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Managing Professional Development of Academic Staff to Enhance University Performance

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Managing Professional Development of Academic Staff to Enhance University Performance

Jennifer Murphy

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Business Administration (Higher Education Management)

University of Bath
School of Management

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Abbreviations:

BERA	British Education Research Association
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EU	European Union
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HR	Human Resources
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMDS	Performance Management and Development System
PDRS	Performance and Development Review System
PSF	Professional Standards Framework
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SEPDC	Staff Enhancement and Professional Development Committee
SJTU	Shanghai Jiao Tong University
THE	Times Higher Education
UK	United Kingdom
UMT	University Management Team

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ABSTRACT

Calls for more effective and modern teaching practices, higher research outputs, leaner administrative processes, greater community engagement, and more student-centred approaches to the business of higher education have intensified the challenges of working in a university. These challenges have added considerable complexity to the roles of academic staff, many of whom are facing increasing demands for which they are ill equipped to deal in terms of their formal education. To succeed in the highly competitive and changing environment that is higher education today, universities need to ensure that the requisite capabilities are developed in their academic staff.

The key question underpinning this study is: *how can the provision of professional development for academic staff be optimised to enhance university performance?* The focus of the research is on identifying the ways in which higher education institutions provide formal offerings of professional development to academic staff, how they are organised to do this, who is entrusted with the task, and what are the strengths and limitations of the approaches taken. The research is informed by literature concerning higher education management, academic development, and strategic human resource management. Taking a critical realist ontological perspective, case studies of professional development provision in two Irish universities are presented.

Findings reveal that while effective professional development is an espoused priority it is not a managed priority. While there is some evidence of good practice, the fragmented organisational structures in place for delivery of professional development reveal an absence of coordination and gaps in provision. The connection between professional development and organisational performance is loose. Recommendations are made on how the provision of professional development for academics can be managed to enhance university performance. A framework for designing performance-led professional development activities that aligns organisational and individual goals is proposed. An organisational structure that takes a more conscious approach to the management of the full range of professional development provision is put forward.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.0 Context and purpose of the study

The higher education sector is no stranger to change and its greatest challenge in recent years is to maintain the most cherished aspects of its core values, while simultaneously responding to the threats and opportunities of an ever changing world. Higher education is often viewed as integral to the economic activity of the nation and universities have been forced to take account of a greater number of outside influences. There has been an increased public interest in the performance of higher education and a growing expectation of its contribution to the knowledge economy and economic growth. This growing interest in performance evaluation is a consequence of some of the forces driving change in the higher education landscape including marketization, internationalisation and globalisation. Governments are showing an increasing anxiety in relation to public sector expenditure and are rapidly reducing the availability of public funding for the higher education sector. As they vigorously compete for a shrinking pool of funding, there is evidence of even greater competition between higher education institutions. There is a growing tendency towards the growth of student numbers that will generate an income for the university, particularly distance learners in an online environment, postgraduate and international students. Another emerging tendency is that universities are increasingly judging themselves, and being judged by their stakeholders, by their position in global rankings and national league tables.

The greatest asset of the university is its staff and the relentless change which has become part and parcel of working in a university today has staff development consequences. The increasing demand for high performance work gives a pressing urgency to the need for a tangible return on the university's investment in professional development provision. Calls for more effective and modern teaching practices, higher research outputs, leaner administrative processes and greater community engagement have intensified the challenges of working in a university. These challenges have added considerable complexity particularly to the roles of academic staff, many of whom are facing increasing demands for which they are ill equipped to deal in terms of their formal education. To succeed in the highly competitive and changing environment that is higher education today, universities need to ensure that the requisite capabilities are developed in their academic staff.

This study takes a deeper look at the university's formal offerings of professional development for academic staff. It acknowledges that all staff of the university, from administrative professionals, to technical workers, clerical, and unskilled manual workers, have their own development needs. However the scope of this study does not encompass the development needs of the full complexity of staffing categories and the scope is limited to academic staff. The traditional boundaries between academic and non-academic work are becoming blurred and the increased emergence of professionals in the third space (Whitchurch 2009) implies that many of the development needs that apply to academics, may also apply to other categories of staff.

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of how universities provide formal offerings of professional development for academic staff, to support all aspects of their role, and to establish the extent to which engagement in the development opportunities contributes to organisational performance. The key question underpinning the research is:

How can the provision of professional development for academic staff be optimised to enhance university performance?

The primary objectives of the study are to:

- Develop a better understanding of the range of ways that professional development of academic staff is currently organised and managed;
- Develop an understanding of how and why academic staff engage with the development opportunities in their universities;
- Identify ways in which the professional development of academic staff can contribute to the performance of the university;
- Make recommendations on how formal offerings of professional development to academic staff can be better organised and managed to enhance university performance.

The focus of this research is on identifying the formal ways in which higher education institutions provide for the development of academic staff, how they are organised to do this, who is entrusted with the task, and what the best approaches are. This study proposes to take a holistic approach to academic professional development, to include all aspects of formal professional development provision that is organised and delivered by the university. Adapted from the definition of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) used by the UK based Professional Associations Research Network, for the purpose of this study professional development is taken to mean:

Any formal process or activity that provides added value to the capability of the academic through the increase in knowledge, skills and personal qualities for appropriate execution of professional and technical duties.

This is not to diminish the value of the informal development, which is recognised as a powerful form of professional development, but is beyond the scope of this study. Taking a management and organisational structures perspective the study will be concerned with the return on the university's investment in professional development of academic staff. More specifically it will address the question of how the provision of academic professional development should be managed and organised in a way that it will better contribute to the performance of the university. At a time of significant economic challenges, it is appropriate to raise questions around the effectiveness of staff development interventions, and their impact on organisational performance. To inform

this study, a review of literature pertaining to university management, academic staff development, and strategic human resource management is examined. The literature is examined in relation to the central research question, the objectives of the study, and the roles of the three key players involved - university managers, academic staff developers and academic staff.

1.1 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 provides an overview of literature which is relevant to the objectives of this study. Three bodies of literature are included in the review: that concerning university management, academic development, and strategic human resources management. The objective here is to link the university management with the responsibility to ensure that there is an appropriate infrastructure in place to provide for the professional development of academic staff to enable them to contribute to organisational performance. Informed by the work of Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu, this chapter considers how the university works as a social organisation. It looks at how the individual is understood in relation to the organisation through the interaction between structure and agency. The meaning of organisational performance in the context of the university is then considered. It acknowledges that global university ranking systems and league tables are having a growing influence on management decisions despite the clear ideological and methodological problems of measuring university performance in this way and the unintended consequences that have been observed by many scholars including Lewis Elton, Ellen Hazelkorn and Simon Marginson. The literature review examines the roles of the three key players in professional development provision for academics: university managers, academics and academic developers. The role of university managers and the characteristics required for effective management are examined. Much of this section is informed by the scholarly work of academics who have worked in senior management positions including Frederick Balderston, Derek Bok, Ian Jamieson and Michael Shattock. The role of the academic and academic identity is discussed in the context of changes in higher education and the increasing emergence of managerial approaches to measure academic performance is considered. Historically universities have paid little attention to the formal support of academic development but the emergence of dedicated centres to develop teaching capabilities since the 1990's is linked to the work of Ernest Boyer and the focus on leadership development that has emerged in the last decade is also discussed. The evolving approaches to delivery of professional development are outlined. The work of Veronica Bamber, Paul Blackmore, Richard Blackwell, David Boud, Angela Brew, Sue Clegg, Graham Webb, Erica McWilliam, John Fielden, Ray Land, Áine Hyland, Colin Pilbeam and Dennis Tourish are just some of those that inform the next sections which outline the sometimes precarious role of the academic developer and the diversity of organisational structures for development provision. Finally the link between professional development and organisational performance in the literature is explored. There is large support for the notion that professional development should link to the achievement of institutional objectives and that better evaluation practice is needed to

show the impact of development efforts. The chapter closes with an identification of gaps in the literature concluding that a study which focuses on the structures in place to provide for the holistic professional development of academics is long overdue.

There are many different ways to approach a research study and chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in this instance. First the research gaps are considered in more detail and research questions that need to be answered to achieve the study's objectives are crafted. The contribution that will be made by this study and its relevance for university managers, academic developers and academic staff is acknowledged. This chapter shows an appreciation of a range of methodological approaches that would be suitable for educational or management research and details the choices that were made with regard to the research design chosen. The implications of the ontological position of the critical realist for the study design are outlined. The case study research methodology using qualitative methods is defended as the most suitable for this study. The factors influencing the selection of two Irish universities as case studies are detailed. Several data collection methods are considered and the semi-structured interviews combined with document analysis are endorsed as the most effective to achieve the study's objectives; albeit their limitations are duly acknowledged. The theoretical framework of Rummier and Brache (1995) is used to inform the collection and analysis of data for the study. This framework sees the organisation as three layers of systems which can be peeled back to understand how the organisation operates, and more importantly the variables affecting its performance. The systems levels of the framework are – organisation, process, and individual. Details of how the data were collected through twenty-three interviews at three levels of the university – management, academic developer, and academic staff – and through a range of relevant university documents are outlined. The processes used to analyse the data are also described in detail. A summary of the ethical considerations and principles of good research practice underpinning the study are provided. The strategies used to strengthen the validity and reliability of the research are also outlined. The chapter concludes that the chosen methodology is highly appropriate to fulfil the study's objectives.

The following two chapters, chapter 4 and chapter 5, each present the findings of a university case study. Chapter 4 concerns University A and chapter 5 concerns University B. Both chapters are structured similarly. The chapter begins with an introduction to the university providing details of its age, size, organisational structure and range of disciplines involved. An overview of the university strategic objectives is provided. Findings that concern the three systems levels of professional development provision – organisation, process, and individual – are presented. At the organisational level, an outline of the structural, management, and financial arrangements that are in place to support professional development provision is provided. The process level concerns the academic development unit, be it the Centre for Teaching and Learning, the Human Resources (HR) unit or the Information Services Department. The methods used by academic developers to select, deliver, communicate, and evaluate their professional development activities are detailed. The individual level concerns the consumer of professional development, i.e. the academic staff member. The perception

of the individual academic of the formal offerings of professional development provided by their university is outlined. A diversity of understandings of professional development is revealed and the way in which academics engage with development initiatives is considered. Each of the case study chapters end with a presentation of the findings related to the link between professional development and performance of the university.

Informed by relevant literature, a cross case analysis is discussed in Chapter 6. This chapter is structured around the four overarching objectives of the study. The chapter begins with an account of the historical context that has contributed to the current fragmented approach to professional development provision in both universities studied. It discusses the tensions between the producer-led approach of HR and Information Services, and the demand-led approach of the Centres for Teaching and Learning. The key findings, which lead to a better understanding of the range of ways that professional development of academic staff is organised and managed are presented and discussed, hence fulfilling the first objective. The next section presents and analyses the key findings from the case studies relevant to the second objective, which is to develop an understanding of how academic staff engage with the development opportunities in their university. The impact of a selection of factors that influence the way in which academics engage with formal development opportunities in their universities are considered, including individuals' understanding of development, academic identity, the link with career progression, academic workload and motivation. The next section is concerned with identification of ways in which academic professional development can contribute to university performance, and relates to the third objective of this study. The performance indicators related to the three main domains of the university's mission, teaching and learning, research, and engagement, are each discussed in their turn. Some ways in which formal offerings of professional development could be designed to enable academic staff to work towards achieving these performance indicators are outlined. In an effort to fulfil the fourth objective, this section is followed by a discussion which argues that a more conscious approach to the management of professional development provision is necessary to support the holistic development of academics. It proposes a framework that could be used to design professional development initiatives that would align individual and organisational goals. This approach takes an aligned goal, performance-led approach to the design, delivery and evaluation of professional development initiatives. It suggests that in the cases of the two universities studied, implementation of this framework would require an institutional professional development strategy that links professional development more closely with organisational performance. Furthermore appropriate organisational structures would be necessary to enable effective coordination and management of the existing range of initiatives. It is suggested that by closer linking professional development activities to university key performance metrics, appropriate evaluation of their impact is enabled and universities will generate greater value from their investment. Finally it is suggested that there would be merit in establishing a set of capabilities that equate to all aspects of academic work and that link to a professional standards framework for the academic profession.

The concluding chapter 7 provides some reflections on the study and duly acknowledge its limitations. It suggests that, notwithstanding its limitations, this study makes a valuable contribution to knowledge related to professional development provision and its link with organisational performance. Recommendations are made which pertain to the three levels of the organisation studied – for university managers, academic developers, and individual academic staff. This chapter calls for greater attention to the important matter of professional development in higher education and its link to organisational performance in the literature. With this in mind, a future research agenda is proposed.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The literature concerning higher education is consistent in its depiction of a landscape that is undergoing transformation which is driven by the dramatic changes in its environmental, social, political and economic context. Commonly cited forces of change in higher education institutions include marketization and consumerism, massification, widening access, internationalisation, globalisation, rapid development of technology, increased diversity of provision, democratisation of knowledge and shrinking public financing (Barber *et al.* 2013; Ernst and Young 2012; Hedley 2010; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005; Land 2004; Newman *et al.* 2004; Pleschová *et al.* 2013). The environment in which universities are operating is becoming increasingly demanding and unpredictable. The increased use of global and national rankings has put a spotlight on the performance of universities and has generated heightened competition between them (Hazelkorn 2009). To succeed in this highly competitive environment, which is in a constant state of flux, universities need to ensure the requisite capabilities are developed in their staff, to enable them to contribute to the performance of the organisation (Blackmore *et al.* 2010; Ernst and Young 2012). A university's greatest asset is the individual and collective capabilities of their staff. The on-going professional development of staff is centrally important and requires key management decisions to be made about development strategy, structures and resourcing (Blackmore and Castley 2006).

Many of the strategic management issues that universities are concerned with today, have only come about in recent decades. These issues need to be addressed by academic staff in their everyday work, and to a greater extent when they take on middle and senior management roles within the institution. Increasing demands are being required of academic staff for which they are ill equipped to deal in terms of their formal education, which in many cases comprises a doctorate in a specialist area (Pleschová *et al.* 2013). Universities have come to assume that individuals possessing a doctorate degree have the capacity to teach and carry out the other roles encompassed by the academic profession (Pilbeam 2009). Similarly, when an academic is appointed to a management position, it is often assumed that management skills will simply emerge as the individual takes on such roles and responsibilities (Brew 1995). But the fact remains that many academics have had no formal training to prepare them for their increasingly complex roles. Many have had no formal teacher training, and many will not have availed of development opportunities in management or leadership issues before taking on academic management roles. Moreover, in relation to academic manager roles, new public management practices may have changed the language of management in higher education, but that does not mean that ideological commitment has been secured. Indeed many manager academics find the management practices of using performance indicators, target setting, benchmarking and performance management objectionable (Deem and Brehony 2005).

This chapter seeks to link more explicitly than has previously been the case, the role of university management in providing appropriate organisational structures for provision of professional development for academic staff. Initially it will look at the way in which universities can be understood as a social organisation through the links between structure and agency. Organisational performance and what it means in the context of the university is then discussed. The role of university managers and how they achieve organisational performance is considered. This is followed by an examination of the variation in roles and identities of academic staff. An overview of the way in which academic professional development has evolved in universities over the last few decades is provided. The role of the academic developer is then examined before considering the potential contribution of academic staff development to the performance of the university.

2.1 Understanding the University as an Organisation: Structure and Agency

A university is a social system, in that it is made up of a range of individuals or agents whose work contributes to wider organisational actions. Universities are complex organisations and a number of theories have been developed to enable a better understanding of the structures and agency therein. In framing this study it is important to consider the ways in which individuals are understood in relation to organisations and the works of Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu are particularly influential in this regard. Giddens' occupation with the structure-agency problem led to his development of Structuration Theory. While structuration theory has been criticized for the difficulty of its application to empirical research (den Hond *et al.* 2012) it is helpful in understanding organisation as a process and in particular in clarifying the dynamics of organisational replication and change, which are often goals of professional development objects.

Structuration is useful in interpreting the relationships between the State, university management, academic developers, and academics as it is concerned with the power dimension of institutions and the possibility, scope, or limitations of human agency in institutionalised settings. Giddens (1984) argues that power is an element of social relationships. Actors have a relative autonomy in making choices, notwithstanding the fact that they do so under conditions that are not of their own choosing. The emphasis in structuration theory then is on the transformative capacity of human agency that makes change possible. Three key elements of Giddens' work highlight important features of social interaction; these are the duality of structure, the actor's knowledgeability, and time-space relations (Yates 1997). The duality of structure concerns the interaction between people and structures. It suggests that structures shape human actions, which in turn constitute the structures (Yates 1997). The theory holds that humans are knowledgeable, reflexive, and purposive agents having the capacity to understand what they do while they do it. Structures are conceptualised not only as restrictions to human agency, but also as enablers. Structures consist of rules and resources involving human action - rules constrain actions, resources make them possible. As reflexive actors, with social knowledge and self-knowledge humans have the ability to consciously alter their place in the social structure through space and time (Broger 2011).

The structuration of the university social system can be studied through examination of the way the system is produced and reproduced in social interactions through the use of generative rules and resources. Individual actors employ the social rules that they have learned through socialisation and experience in their class or culture. The university has a complex mix of cultures including collegiums, enterprise, bureaucracy and corporation (McNay's 1999). All four cultures co-exist in most universities, but with different balances among them. A range of factors influence this balance including traditions, mission, leadership style and external pressures. In pre-entrepreneurial cultures the dominant norms are those of the collegiums and bureaucracy (Davies 2001). The growing emergence of enterprise and corporation cultures in recent years suggests that culture shifts have been successfully cultivated in some institutions. Considering the emergence of increasing numbers of academic managers embracing the values of new managerialism it is conceivable that some internal actors may think that professional development objects (including academic developers) are being used as mechanisms to strengthen managerialist approaches within the organisation. Such approaches are perceived by some academics as serving the interests of the economic elite (Deem and Brehony 2005). By having more ready access to institutional resources, and employing these resources in the delivery of targeted professional development programmes, managers and academic developers could be perceived as attempting to encroach on academic autonomy and subjugate the university to serve the interests of the economic elite.

Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital is helpful in understanding the social role and internal functioning of educational systems. Cultural capital extends to the concepts of field, symbolic power and habitus, where habitus refers to the types of behaviours that people inherit during the various stages of their socialisation, and that inform their further interaction with their social environment. The use of cultural capital by academic managers can serve to marginalise non-managers as evidenced by Clarke & Newman (1992) (cited in Deem and Brehony 2005) who suggest that 'not to be able to speak management leaves one marginal, disenfranchised or rendered speechless'. Two decades later and the management lexicon is inescapable in higher education with all academics likely to be familiar with key performance indicators, performance appraisals, targets, transparency, accountability and so on. With this in mind, it is understandable that the increased introduction of formal professional development programmes for academic-managers and academics could be perceived as a tool to reproduce corporate cultures, an intentional mechanism to further advance the adoption and implementation of management practices (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

While Giddens characterises social reproduction and social change through the self-reflective process of structuration, for Bourdieu the orientation of a field toward a common feature is not the result of the inherent self-development of the structure but instead stems from conflict and competition (Deer 2003). The educational profession competes for power by exchanging unequally distributed social capital, i.e. wealth, political power, and expertise. Exchanges are constrained by various types of habitus. Deer (2003) suggests that in the UK, the growth of social capital of the increasing

student population has seen the interests of students being combined with those of the new higher education institutions which has resulted in an undermining of traditional academic values. This has resulted in the academic profession feeling greater strain as students have gained more power in the delivery of the education they receive. Similarly, Deem and Brehony (2005) found wide evidence of suggestions that new public management practices have led to substantial cultural and organisational change in public service organisations. It has been argued that the gradual integration and functionalisation of higher education and research activities within their broader social environment have resulted in the growing submission of the intellectual field to the economic field (Deer 2003).

The next sections will take a more detailed look at the roles of each of the three key actors in professional development in universities. The role of the university manager will be examined in the context of their responsibility for organisational performance. This will be followed by an examination of the role and identity of the academic and later the position of the academic developer will be critically explored.

2.2 University Managers and their Role in Organisational performance

2.2.1 University performance

What does organisational performance mean in the context of the university? Shattock (2003) suggests that successful organisational performance in higher education is the achievement of teaching and research objectives. Institutional management represents an important factor in a university's performance and their ability to succeed. Success is not predicated on a single decision but on consistently making the right decisions over a long period. But decision making is difficult in a university as very often there is no commonly accepted understanding of the issue at hand, or a shared interpretation of the information available (Pilbeam and Jamieson 2010). The emergence of performance indicators in university global rankings, and in national league tables are having an influence on university management decisions and the potential unintended consequences of such an approach to decision making is concerning many authors (Dill and Soo 2005; Hazelkorn 2007).

The ideological and methodological problems of university performance evaluation have been well documented. The validity of global university ranking systems, which have proliferated in recent years, are highly contested, but they have served to illuminate the performance of universities through the development of indicators to measure specific aspects of their work. The most high profile and well established university ranking systems include the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University's (SJTU) Academic Ranking of World Universities (HEA 2013). With respect to the research performance of universities the indicators used by these two ranking systems include:

- Reputational survey on research;

- Research income;
- Papers per academic;
- Citation impact;
- Papers published in the Journals *Nature* and *Science*;
- Staff winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals.

The performance management of academics' research activities is particularly challenging as research productivity is highly dependent on academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Marginson 2007). Furthermore performance management frameworks that focus on research outputs and on return on investment in research run the risk of jeopardising research quality and integrity. The measurement of university performance is a contested issue in the literature with most measuring methodologies attracting criticism for their limitations. As a research performance evaluation system, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in the UK has been rebuked by academics who feel that it is an overly intrusive accountability mechanism that has impaired their academic freedom (Broadhead and Howard 1998). Such an over mechanistic approach to measuring performance can have detrimental consequences. For instance the RAE was criticised for discouraging complex or radical research which did not fit into the four year assessment cycle (Broadhead and Howard 1998). Furthermore, the additional pressure it puts on academic staff to increase their publication output can have negative consequences for the quality of teaching (Broadhead and Howard 1998; Elton 2000).

Some of the university performance measures are evolving in an effort to more accurately measure performance and to minimise unintended consequences. For instance in the UK, the identification of methodological limitations of the RAE through commissioned reports (Roberts 2003) and public consultations have led to the development of a new Research Excellence Framework (REF), which will be completed in 2014. The REF will involve expert review panels to assess the quality of research and will acknowledge citations, the wider impact of the research and the vitality of the research environment. Research assessment internationally has been criticised for its bias towards the hard sciences and biosciences and towards English-language publications and bibliometric databases, to the detriment of disciplines with more disparate publication cultures and research outputs (Hazelkorn 2009). It has been suggested that these biases have tilted global rankings towards recognition of basic research in established disciplines and that they fail to recognise the potential of emerging disciplines and of new universities (HEA 2013). There are a range of differences between the publication and dissemination practices of different disciplines – rates of publication, citation frequencies, number of authors per publication, language of publication, and the time-span within which research is typically completed. All these factors can positively or negatively affect the choice of indicators in research assessment meaning that there is no single indicator or set of indicators capable of capturing the complexity of research, and so the indicators are proxies (Hazelkorn 2009).

Some authors have expressed their concern that the university management decisions that are made to better the institutions position in the rankings could jeopardise activities like teaching and engagement as they are not measured, and hence are undervalued in ranking methodologies (Dill and Soo 2005). The methodological limitations of measuring teaching performance have been well documented. The causal link between the teaching process and the learning outcome is difficult to determine given the wide range of unrelated factors that can affect the learning (Hénard 2010). The SJTU rankings don't even include indicators of teaching performance. The indicators to measure performance in teaching used in the THE World University Rankings are essentially input and output indicators (Hazelkorn 2009) and include:

- Reputational survey on teaching;
- PhD awards per academic;
- Undergraduates admitted per academic;
- Income per academic;
- PhD awards/Bachelors' awards.

The absence of adequate indicators to measure teaching and engagement can result in neglect of these important areas. The *Irish National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* sets out a number of indicators of performance expectations for teaching at undergraduate level including, flexible programme provision, innovative pedagogies, diverse student participation, modularised and semesterised curricula, greater interdisciplinarity, expansion of work-placement and service-learning opportunities, integration of key generic skills, instillation of a sense of civic responsibility, and enhanced engagement with the regional community. At postgraduate level the teaching performance expectations are an increase in flexibly delivered taught professional development courses, and a shift to structured PhD programmes (DES 2011). However, the strategy does not provide a suite of metrics to evaluate teaching performance in any of these areas.

The third mission of the university is reflected in the engagement role of the academic. This is another area that is neglected in the high profile world university rankings. Engagement performance is recognised in the European Commission funded U-Multirank system which assesses engagement through knowledge transfer, international orientation and regional engagement. Also the European E3M project has designed an instrument for the identification, measurement and comparison of engagement activities (HEA 2013). In the UK the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) have provided a framework for the collection of data on knowledge-exchange activities and furthermore the Higher Education Community Engagement Model was developed as a benchmarking toolkit to capture data on community-engagement activities. Indicators of engagement in these models include:

- Number and quality of strategic partnerships;
- Engagement with local and regional communities and employers;
- Success of alumni, fundraising and sponsorship activity;

- Patents;
- Licenses;
- Number and quality of community based projects.

In relation to the third mission of engagement, the *Irish National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* has a performance expectation that universities will identify community, regional and enterprise needs and proactively respond to them. Universities are expected to be firmly embedded in the social and economic contexts of their communities. It is expected that engagement will be engrained in the mission and will be achieved through increased student and staff mobility, through accreditation of students' civic engagement, through flexible delivery of professional development courses, through fostering of external engagement, and increased internationalisation (DES 2011).

Universities are increasingly judging themselves and being judged by their stakeholders by where they stand in global rankings. As university managers seek to improve their place in the rankings they should be cognisant of the potential unintended consequences of focusing on the metrics that are valued in the rankings, to the detriment of aspects of university education that are not easily measured and thence under-valued by the high profile ranking systems.

2.2.2 Role of University Manager

Universities are expected to deliver on an increased range of goals and priorities and in some cases this has led to fundamental changes in management practices, with more managerial, corporate and entrepreneurial models emerging, often in conflict with the expectations of collegiality, collaboration and participative decision making (Bolden *et al.* 2009). There is unprecedented uncertainty about the change agenda facing higher education and major and disruptive change is predicted to become a normal part of the landscape (Barber *et al.* 2013; Ernst and Young 2012; Tourish 2012.). Given the high level of complexity of university operations and structures, guiding the affairs of the university can be an onerous task (Balderston 1995). How decisions are taken, by whom and to what end are critical elements in the success of the university (Shattock 2003). Referring predominately to the private sector, Rummler and Brache (1995) suggest that managers often don't understand, at a sufficient level of detail, how their organisation works. When managers see the organisation vertically and functionally, they tend to manage in that way, which leads to the development of silos around departments. The reference to silos is also a criticism of university organisational cultures (MacGregor and Makoni 2010). Silos prevent interdepartmental issues from being resolved, and the resulting silo culture focuses managers' attention at lower-level issues to the detriment of higher-priority concerns. To avoid the development of silos managers should view the organisation horizontally, as systems of how work actually gets done. Work gets done through processes that cut across functional boundaries and it is in these functional interfaces that the greatest opportunities for performance improvement can be found (Rummler and Brache 1995). This suggestion is echoed by Pilbeam and Jamieson

(2010) who advise university managers to pay particular attention to managing issues that span boundaries within the institution. They highlight the importance of managing relationships across boundaries to maximize opportunities and minimize threats.

Balderston (1995) reveals that universities are more attuned to their processes and their mechanisms than they are to consequences, having more measures of activity or size than of results. He indicates that those involved in university management should give equal attention to processes, mechanisms, and consequences. A management style that addresses the processes of university management holistically relating each decision to the whole range of institutional activities and programmes so that they complement one another is desirable (Shattock 2003). This approach relies on the establishment of broad objectives that determine realistic long term goals and that are supported by an annual strategic review. The role of senior officers typically embraces traditional notions of management and leadership. Essential characteristics required by managers to achieve organisational goals include flexibility, knowledge creation, collaboration, commitment to collegiality, participation and driving ambition (Shattock 2003). Coalition building, negotiating, information gathering, and political skills are further important features of university management (Balderston 1995; Pilbeam and Jamieson 2010). Some skills are accorded more importance than others, with acting as figurehead, networking, monitoring, and filtering and disseminating information, being particularly valuable in enhancing the performance of the university (Pilbeam and Jamieson 2010). Another characteristic necessary for managers to develop is the ability to communicate effectively. If decision making is managed such that it is achieved through general consensus on broad objectives, the decisions that are taken should be mutually reinforcing and build momentum towards the achievement of organisational goals (Shattock 2003). It is critical that academic managers have the ability to assemble work groups that possess the requisite skills to inform decision making and that the whole academic community is appropriately consulted (Bok 2003). University management is “generally by persuasion rather than managerial diktat” (Pilbeam and Jamieson 2010, p. 760) but the speed of decision making is an important success factor. Success is very often achieved by “being able to mobilize opinion and reach a decision faster than one’s competitors in the confident knowledge that it will command retrospective institutional support” (Shattock 2003, p.38). The extent of the range of skills required for effective academic managers has significant staff development consequences.

Many of the commentators with practical experience of managing universities stress the importance of effective financial management in successful organisational performance. It is widely indicated that a university’s success is predicated on its ability to generate sufficient funding, and to being budgetary disciplined in getting the best value out of the resources deployed to support the teaching and research mission (Balderston 1995; Bok 2003; Clarke 1998; Shattock 2003; Walsh 2011). The necessity to provide financial awareness training for heads of departments is recognised (Shattock 2003). However in the literature produced by those with practical experience in senior management of universities, there is a notable absence of reference to the potential of academic staff

development towards achieving institutional objectives, and the role of senior management teams in providing the appropriate organisational structures and resources to facilitate professional development of academics. In order for staff development to be effective, it must be appropriately managed and resourced. Brew (1995) highlights the frequent mismatch between what managers expect staff development units to provide and the resources they are allocated. In devolved organisational structures, it is the responsibility of the budget holder to make decisions about investment in staff development. Brew (1995) recognises that there are problems in deciding on the appropriate balance of resources for a central staff development unit, and for academic departments and support units, as managers may lack appropriate criteria for such decisions. The concentration of staff development resources at the level of the department may affect the implementation of institution-wide developments and lead to duplication and wastage across departments. On the other hand over concentration of resources in central staff development units may result in a concentration on general training and may create the sense of remote alignment with departmental, group and individual staff needs.

Deciding where to locate staff development services within the organisation is a difficult dilemma for university managers. The balance of institutional and individual needs must be sensitively addressed. Where staff development is focused on institutional priorities individuals may find that their own development needs are not addressed. If individuals are compelled to undergo training they may feel a threat to their professional autonomy. If individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for their own development, there is no guarantee that they will engage with the training and development that is perceived necessary to achieve the institution's mission (Brew 1995). It is the role of senior management to make decisions on broad policy objectives and to provide the appropriate resources for staff development. Brew (1995) raises a concern that many academic developers are working in the absence of clarity on university policy and priorities, and suggests that the preparation of a staff development policy and framework is a necessary first step to guide decision making. Yet there are many universities that don't have such a policy or framework underpinning their professional development provision. This is the case despite that recent policy initiatives at European and national levels are placing increased demands on universities and academic staff, with many of these demands having considerable staff development consequences – for instance mass education, more student-centred teaching, greater diversity in student bodies, etc. (Pleschová 2013).

Managers that are responsible for institutional policy development need to be cognisant of the sources of academic tension around market driven external policies with a consumerist focus, and its consequences for staff development. Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) argue that such policies are seeking to fundamentally change the terms on which teaching and learning takes place in higher education. They suggest that “attempts to restructure professional cultures to comply with consumerist frameworks may unintentionally deter innovation and promote passive and instrumental attitudes to

learning” (p.279). Boud (1995) is cautious of the adoption of corporate management ideas like performance management that could serve to negatively change the ethos of the institution. He is critical of senior management that will use staff development units to pursue their own short-term agendas. He warns that the adoption of new staff development ideas drawn from the field of human resource development need critical scrutiny and consideration before their introduction in the higher education context. Brew (1995) suggests that a carefully designed and negotiated development model of appraisal may be helpful in aligning institutional and individual needs. Such a model may encourage the embedding of training and development as an important and normal aspect of an individual’s work, where academics can expose vulnerabilities and seek out better practice without fear of negative consequences.

The way in which a university is managed is critical to the success or failure of the individual academic departments within it. Staff development has the potential to enhance the ability of academic managers and academics to achieve organisational goals, but the range, scope and potential of staff development are predicated on the level of management’s understanding of staff development issues (Brew 1995). Sustained success requires an ability to harmonise the various components of university management to be mutually reinforcing, where strategic managers draw policies, procedures and processes together to achieve the best performance outcomes.

2.3 Academic Roles and Identities

There is a notable lack of theoretical research in understanding the academic profession (Clegg 2003). The term ‘academic’ is problematic in itself as it is not self-defining (Strike 2005). A wide range of staff in higher education with diverse roles and responsibilities consider themselves as academics. Indeed many academics that take on institutional roles that don’t involve teaching or research continue to consider themselves as academics. Boyer (1990) reminds us that, historically, teaching was the primary role of academics. This later expanded to include service; research was added to the remit late in the nineteenth century and more recently academics are expected to blend and integrate all three roles. The roles encompassed by academics are becoming increasingly complex (Blackmore and Blackwell 2003). The role can encompass, research, teaching, administration, entrepreneurial activity, consultancy, community engagement, management responsibilities, and so on. The responsibilities involved in each of these roles are becoming more and more demanding. Within the teaching role for instance, in recent years academics are required *inter alia* to:

“design learning outcomes and assessment, give and respond to feedback, embed an increasing range of skills into the curriculum, maximise the opportunities associated with classroom diversity and consider ethical issues. They are expected to be aware of and ...to understand the theoretical underpinnings of all these aspects of their teaching and student learning” (Higgs and McCarthy 2008, p.4).

The tension between the dual academic roles of teaching and research is a major issue in professional development. Much development work linked to research and scholarship is not even categorised as professional development (Clegg 2003). The problem of the dual professional is a common theme in the literature that focuses on academic identity (Clegg 2003; Blackmore and Blackwell 2003; Higgs and McCarthy 2008). An academic may identify themselves as a Historian, a Scientist, a Dentist or a multitude of other professions. The dualism between research and teaching and discipline and organisation are major shapers of academic identity (Clegg 2003). The complexity of academic professional identity sees many academics preferring to ground their professional status and identity within their disciplinary community rather than their institution (Blackmore and Blackwell 2003). It has been suggested that an academics “fidelity to the university as a whole may be weak, or indeed (if it conflicts with fidelity to discipline) hardly discernible at all” (Hedley 2010, p.139). Academics that are working in inter-departmental or inter-disciplinary roles have further identity dilemmas. Some disciplines are no longer uniformly congruent with the institutional organisation of academics into Schools or Departments. The notion of the single discipline is challenged by the emergence of themes that transcend individual subjects such as the environment or genetics, with academics in these areas increasingly working in teams (Strike 2005). Regardless of the discipline, it is generally expected that all academics are involved to some level in teaching, research, engagement, and administration, with varying degrees of emphasis in individuals’ commitment and capacity for the diversity of roles. The extent of an individual’s involvement in specific roles is likely to vary as their career progresses.

A number of commentators are concerned about the way in which the marketization and consumerist approaches to higher education policy and practice are affecting the role and identity of the academic (Dill 2005; Newman *et al.* 2004; Naidoo and Jamieson 2005). The commodification of the learning relationship has led to the erosion of traditional academic ethic (Dill 2005), with some academics now opting for the transmission mode of teaching, as a self-protecting measure (Naidoo and Jamieson 2005). Newman *et al.* (2004) despair at the problems that have emerged with rankings and league tables. It has resulted in a relentless mission creep for many institutions as the research agenda, due to its potential to attract funding and enhance reputation, is disproportionately prioritised to the detriment of teaching (Newman *et al.* 2004). The introduction of the business lexicon into the world of higher education is fundamentally altering the way many learners view themselves and the world, and leaves some academics questioning their role and responsibility. The practice of new managerial approaches which is associated with the widespread use of performance indicators, league tables, target setting, benchmarking and performance management is thought by some as an attempt at an ideological reform of higher education and many academics and middle managers are resistant to these approaches (Deem and Brehony 2005).

2.4 Evolution of Academic Professional Development in Higher Education

Higher education has an ambivalent relationship with professional development (Clegg 2003). The practice of continuing professional education is now widespread across Engineering, Medicine, Law and many other professions as a basis for re-licensure and re-certification. However, the same regulation is not prevalent when it comes to the academic profession.

Boud (1999) describes the evolution of academic development and associated theoretical ideas in six phases, where each phase has a distinct perception of development. These are:

1. Development as embedded and invisible in academic life
2. Development as a moral imperative
3. Development as corporate policy
4. Development as multidimensional and distributed
5. Development as localised practice
6. Development as reciprocal peer learning

The theoretical underpinning of these phases starts in situated learning, where the academic values of autonomy inhibited senior management in addressing issues of poor teaching and limited research output. As the moral imperative of students learning started to take priority, early attempts at formalising academic development appeared and were influenced by adult learning theories. From the late 1980s managerialist notions of quality assurance and performance management led to the wider establishment of development programmes and a greater expectation that academics engage with them. The proliferation of development programmes and one-off events at national, central and local levels with a multidimensional focus distributed and dispersed control over such activities. Later the emphasis shifted from development activities organised at departmental level to that organised centrally within the institution. The move towards reciprocal peer learning frameworks for considering academic development was influenced by the shift from the individualised approach to academic work to more cooperative and collaborative working practices. Blackmore *et al.* (2010) observe that the development provision in universities is often prompted by external funding-led initiatives.

Literature relating to academic staff development has emerged in great quantities since the 1990's. It is curious that the focus of academic professional development literature from this time is primarily centred around activities related to teaching and learning, as it is generally accepted in the literature that teaching is neither the activity most rewarded by the academic profession nor the one most valued by the system at large (Boyer 1990; Smith 1991; Ramsden *et al.* 1995; Jing *et al.* 2005). The emphasis on teaching is due to the fact that the literature is predominantly written by authors with academic developer roles, who work in centres focused on teaching and learning development activities. Much of this literature is underpinned with the work of Ernest

Boyer who called for a radical re-consideration of scholarship, arguing that colleges and universities needed new forms of scholarship beyond the traditional research model, what he termed the scholarship of discovery. He called for three additional forms: a scholarship of integration; a scholarship of application; and a scholarship of teaching.

The groundswell of support for greater recognition of scholarship of teaching from the 1990's onwards was a catalyst for the widespread establishment of dedicated centres for teaching and learning. These were primarily bottom-up entities focussed on development of academic staff to enhance the student learning experience.

Development activities initially comprised seminars, workshops, conferences and other events. The feedback from these events suggested that participants would like their efforts accredited and the provision evolved from one-off events and series of seminars, to fully accredited Certificate, Diploma, Masters, and even PhD programmes (Murphy 2012). The commitments of the Bologna Process, which commenced in the late 1990's, became one of the key drivers of academic development activities in some European countries, with Ireland and Scotland being the two countries credited with the most comprehensive implementation of its processes (Mernagh 2010). The Bologna Process turned access participation rates, graduates' employability, internationalisation, student mobility and lifelong learning into central concerns for some of the participating countries (Sursock and Smidt 2010). Reforms included the implementation of the Bologna tools - European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the Diploma Supplement and National Qualifications Frameworks, and the development of Quality Assurance and Quality Improvement systems (Eurydice 2010; Rauhvargers *et al.* 2009; Sursock and Smidt 2010). The learning outcomes approach to curriculum design, for example, and a shift in focus from teacher-centred to student-centred methodologies introduced significant implications for teaching methodologies and approaches. Hyland (2010) highlights the training and up-skilling implications arising from the Bologna Process, and stresses the necessity for appropriate training and development initiatives to ensure the alignment of learning outcomes, teaching approaches/pedagogies, and modes of assessment.

Despite the wide availability of professional development opportunities in relation to the teaching function, many academic staff still choose not to engage. The principles of academic freedom and autonomy have a significant influence on the way academic staff view staff development arrangements. It is frequently taken to mean that "academics can decide in an *ad hoc* manner what is best for their own, their students' and their institutions' development" and can extend to the notion that an academic has the freedom not to participate in any form of training or development if they feel so inclined (Brew 1995, p. 8). Boud (1999) speculates that the reservations of some academics to engage may arise due to the sensitivities around revealing development needs to heads of departments. Academic heads of departments are often elected to their position for a temporary duration meaning that an academic's line manager may quite possibly become their subordinate at some later stage. Due to this complexity in managerial relationships academics need to sensitively manage their image of competence. The

lower status of academic capital attributed to the teaching role, and the undue extent to which scholarship is defined and measured exclusively on the basis of research publication (Smith 1991) is likely to be another inhibiting factor of widespread engagement with related professional development activities.

There is a dearth of literature related to professional development provision catering for the research and third stream roles of the academic. In the last decade universities and research councils are taking a broader interest in research support, but are largely focusing on contract research staff (Blackmore *et al.* 2010). This support is usually linked to the institutional Research Office. Leadership development has been the focus of much attention in many higher education institutions in recent years. Leadership development in many universities is linked to the HR function (Blackmore *et al.* 2010). Fielden (2009) observes that most academics in senior managerial positions, like Vice President or Vice Chancellor, were appointed without formal management development or training. Therefore their ability to draw on management theories is limited in contrast to managers in other fields who have been trained extensively from in-house courses to MBA's (Deem and Brehony 2005). In recent years leadership development is high on the agenda of university management and there is huge variety in the content and pedagogy of the programmes being delivered (Burgoyne *et al.* 2009). The main forms of leadership development are formal courses (internally or externally provided), 360-degree performance feedback, coaching, mentoring, networking, job assignments, and action learning (Tourish 2012). The teaching methods in most cases are based on case studies, master classes, workshops, projects and study visits (Fielden 2009). A study of leadership development in higher education in the UK by Burgoyne *et al.* (2009) showed that much of the leadership development taking place is focused on individual leaders and that many of the programmes are not aligned with university strategic goals and organisational change. The study found that leadership development is increasing in importance in higher education, with seventy per cent of the institutions studied having a leadership development strategy. By and large it was the HR department taking responsibility for the strategy. The link between leadership development and organisational development was found to be weak in most cases, leading the authors to conclude that the majority of universities are at a relatively early stage in their understanding of the potential of leadership development as a catalyst for organisational change. Much of the leadership theory and research in higher education has been deemed descriptive or normative and not linked to measures of effectiveness (Bolden *et al.* 2009). That said a large majority of respondents in Burgoyne *et al.*'s (2009) study indicated a belief that their investment in leadership development gives value for money, with coaching, mentoring and executive development thought to be the most effective forms.

The evolution of professional development provision has seen the rise of several distinct development communities. Blackmore *et al.* (2010) explore the question of whether the provision which has grown organically recognises the diversity of need in the fast changing sector, or whether it is now too complex, with too many stakeholders, vested

interests and working practices. The role of the academic developer as a key stakeholder in the process is now examined.

2.5 Role of Academic Developer

The role of the academic developer, is defined by Fraser (2001, p.55), as one that is “explicitly expected to work with academics to assist them to reflect upon their academic role in relation to teaching, research, scholarship, leadership, funding applications and supervision of students”. Academic development has moved from cottage industry to institutional necessity and the impact of academic developers, while already evident at many levels, has the capacity to make a more profound impact on the institution (Webb 1996b). However the fact that most academic developers have neither formal preparation for their role nor experience of senior management has raised concern around their capacity and professionalism (Blackwell and Blackmore 2003). There is no formal preparation or clear route into the role of academic staff developer and the role is often undertaken by individuals who have not followed a traditional academic pathway. In some cases this can result in a gulf between their defined roles and identities (Higgs and McCarthy 2008). Describing his own role as an academic developer, Webb (1996a) outlines the range of activities he undertakes from organising workshops, seminars and symposia on various topics, conducting teaching consultations with teams and individuals, participation in quality and audit reviews, and engaging in institutional research and evaluation projects related to academic development. Citing Andresen (1991), Brew (1995) adds further roles that academic developers may undertake including:

- Teacher (of academic staff);
- Researcher (of curriculum development and related teaching topics);
- Academic (undertaking scholarship);
- Administrator (of policies and practices);
- Broker (finding the most appropriate resources to meet the development needs);
- Manager (of resources);
- Counsellor (of staff);
- Leader (of good practice) and
- Change agent.

Academic developers are often taking on simultaneous roles as teachers, learners, researchers, facilitators, and managers such that some authors suggest that it may be problematic to use only one term to encompass all their roles (Hyland 2007). The precarious status of academic developers is a common theme in the literature. A basic problem that has been highlighted is the absence of a unified view of the requirements of the role. Brew (1995, p.12) concisely summarises this problem as follows:

“Some practitioners are academics with academic backgrounds and aspirations. They may talk in terms of educational development and pursue educational

research and development projects. Some staff developers in institutions of higher education are administrative staff. They work on different kinds of contracts, and may see themselves more as trainers or human resource developers than academics. Indeed, higher education personnel managers, following an industrial notion of training, increasingly perceive that they have a responsibility and a role in staff development. Staff development is often viewed by the senior management as a service, not as a scholarly activity. It is often viewed quite separately from and having no links with educational development with its emphasis on teaching and learning.”

Academic developers operate in a variety of ways within a range of contexts, and their status and identity is often linked to their location within the organisational structures. For instance, when professional development is linked closely with the reform and quality agenda, the role of staff developer can be perceived as that of institutional change agent. Clegg (2003) suggests that this perception of the role can create ethical and political dilemmas for some academic developers. Boud (1995) anticipates that staff development personnel will always have a role in assisting senior management to achieve the mission of the university, but also in responding directly to staff initiatives. Webb and Murphy (2000) suggest that staff developers working in a central unit need to plan and develop resources and the events which will attract a wide audience. They need to integrate a wide range of learning opportunities into teaching qualifications so that staff can gain credit for their effort. They argue that the academic developer should adopt a “broad and thin” strategy when it comes to spending resources to ensure that all academics can gain access to a minimum level of support (Webb and Murphy 2000, p.24). The location of the academic developer within the institutional structures has implications for how the role is perceived, and its potential to contribute to the achievement of organisational objectives. It will also have consequences for the way in which the academic developer interprets their role. Blackwell (2003) identifies a number of potential staffing structures for locating academic development roles including:

- Joint appointments between staff development unit and academic department;
- Physically locate academic developers which are funded from the central unit in departments;
- Encourage staff in the academic department to take on an academic development role as part of their existing brief;
- ‘Buy out’ academic staff to free them up to take on responsibility for academic development;
- Central unit allocating free consultancy days to departments on a *pro rata* basis;
- Charge-back model.

There is wide variation in the approaches taken to locating academic development in universities. Consequently there is wide variation in the approaches taken by academic developers to their task, with some focusing on their own scholarship of teaching and

learning, some procuring external personnel to deliver the development sessions, and others delivering the development opportunities themselves. There are calls for a shift from practical and instrumental approaches to reflective and value-orientated approaches (Webb 1992). Brew (1995) argues that the variability of approaches taken by staff developers to the task, combined with the competing demands and dilemmas in the organisation of staff development has contributed to the failure of academic developers to organise themselves professionally, and to establish a professional identity. The rapidly changing higher education landscape presents major dilemmas for academic developers in relation to how they are located, perceived and structured (Clegg 2003). The consequences of the growing consumerist approach to higher education policy and practice brings major challenges for academic development and the role of the academic developer. Naidoo and Jamieson (2005) highlight the tensions related to academic time and energy being spent on documenting and accounting for professional activity, rather than developing innovative academic programmes and working with students. Increased pressure from higher student numbers, greater demands for research output, and the commodification of the student-teacher relationship has resulted in some cases in a change in academic behaviours. For instance a shift from academics providing individually tailored feedback based on professional judgement, to minimal standardised feedback, as a self-protecting measure, has been noted (Naidoo and Jamieson 2005). In an environment that increasingly values crude metrics, there is a challenge for the academic developer to restore the intrinsic emotional academic attributes that are difficult to measure, like commitment to the pedagogic process, enthusiasm for the subject, and flexibility in catering for different student needs. It will be important that those whose responsibility it is to lead staff development units maintain enough of a degree of independence from senior management to allow their units to critique institutional policies and practices, without compromising institutional priorities (Brew 1995).

The relationship between the academic developer and the academic is an important one. Academic developers cannot assume respect granted by their position, as often they will be working with academics that have higher academic status or greater experience than themselves and so credibility needs to be established through their practice (Webb 1996b). Webb (1996b) is critical of the action research approaches traditionally taken by academic developers. He is uncomfortable with the positivist philosophical underpinning that has been used to legitimise that they are working towards change for the better. He questions who can truthfully answer questions like, what constitutes 'better' teaching and how it can be fostered. Influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, Webb (1996b) argues that the truth concerning what comprises 'good teaching' can never be asserted separately from a discourse/practice. Knowledge is not disinterested; therefore it could credibly be argued that the theory and practice espoused by staff developers better serves their own interests than those they purport to serve. Disparaging of the drive to conformity of staff developers using critical theory and action research approaches, Webb (1996b) endeavours to promote constructivist approaches that are open to multiple claims to understanding and that are indicative of

postmodernity - always in construction, subject to renegotiation, pragmatic, contingent and transitory. McWilliam (2002) is similarly sceptical about the truth claims made within the discursive domain of academic development. She has concerns about the sort of knowledge that is coming to count as worthwhile for all professionals, including academics, and the current proliferation of mechanisms for disseminating this knowledge. She suggests that knowledge presumed to be relevant to the development of professional workers can undermine worthwhile local and context sensitive knowledge.

The way in which development as a generic idea can be turned into a set of techniques for producing a particular set of power relations between developers and those understood to need developing is a concern for McWilliam (2002). Arguing that development is always predicated on the idea that someone is knowledgeable while someone else is knowledge deficient, she suggests the communication between academic developers and academics cannot be a conversation among equals. Using the analogy of third world development efforts to describe professional development in higher education, McWilliam (2002) argues that just as third world development efforts often fall short of their professed goals of advancing the 'underdeveloped' community, professional development must also be acknowledged to be "a flawed project that constructs new power/knowledge relationships in universities for better and worse" (p.10). One of the 'better' outcomes of professional development acknowledged by McWilliam (2007) however is the shift in the teacher's role from 'sage on the stage' to 'guide on the side'. This has served an important function in shifting the focus from the teacher to the learner, but McWilliam (2007) argues that a further shift is now required to 'meddler-in-the-middle'. She encourages academics and academic managers to bring to professional development the same systematic curiosity and capacity for scepticism that is the hallmark of good science and good scholarship. Like Webb, she is critical of the order of thinking which insists that generalisable theories are the only useful knowledge, and naïve optimism the only legitimate basis for engagement. The role of the academic developer and the knowledge which counts as professional development, and the processes through which that development occurs, must be scrutinised more closely to avoid the potential unintended outcome of "radical doubt" among academics (McWilliam 2002, p.10).

2.6 Trends in Organisational Structure of Academic Staff Development

The purpose of an organisational structure is to co-ordinate the activities of employees so that organisational goals are achieved (Tiernan *et al.* 2006). Organisational structure concerns the systems of task, reporting and authority relationships within which work is carried out. The two main components of an organisations structure are the configuration (illustrated with an organisational chart) and the operation (concerning the processes, decision making, formalisation, responsibility, and authority within the structure). It is important to understand the structures in place for academic staff development, as to enable effective and efficient organisational performance there must

be consistency between the tasks to be performed and the structures in place for their coordination (Pilbeam 2009). There are a number of perspectives on optimal organisational designs to maximise the organisations performance. Contingency theory was introduced in recognition that there is no one best way of structuring an organisation and that factors such as size, life cycle, technology and the environment bear influence on the organisational structure and operations (Tiernan *et al.* 2006). Mintzberg (1981) indicates that the choice of structure will depend on factors like age, and stage in the lifecycle, and suggests that it is important that there is a fit between the structure, the structural imperatives, the organisation's strategy and the components of the structure (co-ordination, division of labour, formalisation and decision making). If the elements do not fit together, the structure will be ineffective.

There is little evidence of research on successful organisation structures of staff development on which universities can draw. The model of staff development that exists in practice will very much depend on the organisational structure and culture of the university (Land 2001) so an understanding of the macro university structures is necessary. McNay (1999) offers a model of university cultures which describes four disparate styles of exercising control over policy and practice. These are collegium, bureaucracy, enterprise and corporation. In relation to structures, Mintzberg (1980) identifies five different types: simple structure; machine bureaucracy; professional bureaucracy; divisionalised structure; and adhocracy. He recognised five components of an organisation, which were translated by Pilbeam (2009) into components of the university environment, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Organisation components mapped to university components

	Organisation Components (Mintzberg 1980)	University Components (Pilbeam 2009)
1	The Operating Core	Academic Staff
2	Middle Line	Deans and Heads of School/Departments
3	Strategic Apex	Senior Management Team
4	Technostructure	University registries, HR, finance office etc.
5	Support Staff	Library, marketing, international office etc.

Mintzberg (1980) suggests that the prominence given to any particular component will influence the organisational configuration and the primary coordinating mechanism used. For instance, if the technostructure is dominant, work processes are standardised and the organisation tends towards a machine bureaucracy. If the academic staff are given prominence the organisation will look more like a professional bureaucracy. When support staff become more influential the configuration of the university is closer to an adhocracy. If the senior management team controls all decision making a simple structure evolves. Finally if the Deans and Department Heads gain power, the university

becomes divided, where each unit standardises its own outputs (Pilbeam 2009). The environmental conditions bear a strong influence on which component and coordination mechanism become dominant; professional bureaucracies are common in stable environments and adhocracies in unstable environments. Mintzberg (1981) suggests that effective organisations will adopt configurations that are congruent with their environment and that are internally consistent. They will also balance competing influences of direction, efficiency, proficiency, concentration and innovation. Pilbeam (2009) maps these influences of direction, with the university components and the structures as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Mapping dominant components with university structures

Dominant Component	Dominant Coordination Mechanism	Organisational Configuration Tends Towards
Senior Management Team	Direction	Simple Structure
University registries, HR, finance office, etc.	Efficiency	Machine Bureaucracy
Academic staff	Proficiency	Professional Bureaucracy
Deans and Heads of School/Departments	Concentration	Divisionalised Structure
Library, marketing, international office, etc.	Innovation	Adhocracy

This perspective of an organisation according to Pilbeam (2009) prioritises organisational efficiency, emphasising that the coordination and control of activity are critical dimensions for organisational success. Using these typologies of organisation it may be possible to explore how academic staff development should be designed and coordinated to enhance organisational performance, and what process and practices should be used to obtain legitimacy. The literature reveals that staff development structures in universities are a product of circumstances and staffing decisions, and not the rational outcome of considered judgement (Boud 1995; Brew 1995). In practice, academic professional development in universities is distributed in a fragmented way, among various outlets, including, academic departments, human resources, teaching and learning centres, library, computer services, and others (Allan *et al.* 2003; Blackwell and Blackmore 2003; Brew 1995; Clegg 2003). It is a complex tapestry of interwoven developments (Land 2004). Clegg (2003) observes that there is no common pattern across the sector, and suggests that the different focus and location of staff development can be linked to the different orientations towards development practice. This notion is extended by Land (2001), who presents a comprehensive but rather complex model of academic development where twelve identified orientations to academic development are mapped to four organisational cultures. This model aligns orientations to academic development (be they emancipatory or domesticating *etc.*) with particular stakeholder groups, bodies of procedural knowledge and orientation tendencies to institutional

policy. This model, like many others, is focused on academic development largely in relation to the teaching role. Boud and MacDonald (1981) (cited in Parker 2003) identify three models for delivery of staff development, again in relation to the teaching role only: the professional service model which focuses on the acquisition of technical skills for teaching; the counselling model where teachers work with staff developers to find solutions to classroom problems; and the collegial model where developers work in conjunction with teachers to improve their competence in practice. Each of these models has significant variations in their structure, location, and approach to development. Gosling's (2001) survey of education development units indicates that thirty-eight per cent are standalone units, seventeen per cent fall under human resources management functions and thirteen per cent within education departments. He attributes the variety in structure and reporting line of the education development units to variation in factors such as institutional type, history, policy priorities and political power plays, which echoes the impression of other authors that the structure is not the logical outcome of careful planning (Boud 1995; Brew 1995).

Boud (1995) identifies two main conceptions of staff development, each having their distinct strengths and weaknesses, under which he suggests all other conceptions can broadly fit. The first he calls the "conscience of teaching and learning" (p.203). These academic development units are characterised by staff with diverse disciplinary backgrounds, but have in common that they research their own practice, or work collaboratively with others in their investigations. They protectively guard their academic status and perceive their work as focused on academic staff in the enhancement of teaching and learning. These units have a strong impact on teaching and learning but are poor at responding to other institutional and management priorities. The second conception of staff development is as "a key institutional and personnel function" (p.204). Units exemplifying this conception are characterised by staff with diverse backgrounds, with many of them likely to have engaged in study of management or personnel and many will have held a management position. They will not have engaged in substantial research typically and will view staff development as closely linked with personnel and performance management. They will place particular emphasis on the development needs of managers, who are expected in turn to lead the necessary changes in the institution. This second conception is usually more effective at responding to institutional and management priorities.

Academic staff development to date has been primarily concerned with activities relating to teaching and learning (Webb 1996; Clegg 2003; Boud 1999) but calls for academic development to take account of the holistic role of the academic and to become more strategic in meeting institutional goals are growing louder (Bamber 2009; Blackwell and Blackmore 2003; Brew 1995; Clegg 2003). For this to happen, academic staff development should encompass institutional policies, programmes and procedures that facilitate and support them to meet their own and their institution's performance needs. Ideally development opportunities should include issues concerning

administration, management, community service and policy formation (Clegg 2003; Fraser 2001).

The absence of systematic thinking about development in universities is highlighted by Boud (1999), who proposes that academic development be prioritised in strategic plans. He suggests that conspicuous acts of leadership are required to embed academic development into daily practice. The literature reveals that academic professional development is currently disproportionately focused on the teaching role, and that other development opportunities are provided in an uncoordinated fragmented way by a range of disparate academic and support units. This situation presents a clear opportunity for universities to enhance their performance through more strategic organisation and coordination of academic development opportunities using a structured, integrated approach which is contextually relevant (Bamber 2009).

2.7 Linking Academic Staff Development to Organisational Performance

In large complex organisations the staff development and training needs are vast and multifaceted. The fundamental purpose of professional development is to improve practice (Cervero 2001) and organisational performance (Rummler and Brache 1995). Brew (1995) highlights that there is a confusing array of models of staff development organisation and practice, making it difficult for management to distinguish the good from the mediocre. Considering that universities spend considerable amounts of funding on development programmes (Burgoyne *et al.* 2009), it is important that they are able to assess the return on their investment in terms of enhanced organisational performance. In a survey concerning the practice of evaluating staff development in the UK, Baume and Baume (1995) found that the practice of evaluating staff development programmes and events was widespread. However, little evaluation was carried out in respect of the impact of academic development on achieving institutional policy and strategic objectives. This is a gap in current practice that would benefit from being addressed as it would enable academic developers to make “the case for staff development as a respectable profession which makes a real contribution to the quality of educational provision” going beyond assertion and moving toward proof (Baume and Baume 1995, p.189). Guest and Clinton (2007) found that the least effective university HR practices were in the area of performance management and that the influence of the HR department on the quality of university core outcomes was low. They found no direct association between any measures of HR activities in universities and a range of standard indicators of university performance.

Baume and Baume (1995) advocate for the evaluation of academic development to “comprise a systematic description of the staff development object, followed by a systematic assessment of its merit, value [and] cost-effectiveness” (p.190). Objects of staff development include the staff development policy, the unit (or service), the staff development programme, and specific events/activities. They suggest that any staff development object can be evaluated against the following four sets of criteria:

- Extent to which the immediate expressed needs or goals were met;
- Contribution made to the achievement of broader institutional and national goals;
- Extent to which institutional standards and norms are met (in areas such as equal opportunities etc.);
- Effectiveness of the method adopted compared to other possible methods.

The purpose of the evaluation should be clear, and the appropriate method of evaluation planned and carried out only by those with the necessary skills. The findings of the evaluation should then be communicated to the relevant stakeholders, who can inform changes to current practice. A range of stakeholders, including policy makers, academic developers, academics, and students, may be affected by the conclusions drawn from any evaluation of staff development objects. This list of stakeholders and their interests should be drawn up and the evaluation should aspire to meet the needs of all (Baume and Baume 1995). Evaluation of academic development can serve three functions, as identified by Baume and Baume (1995). First it can serve to improve the process of staff development. Second it can serve to provide accountability – informing future resourcing decisions, the selection of staff developers, and the choice of staff development activity. Finally evaluation can serve a socio-political function to garner support for staff development and to make a case for more resources. Concerned that staff development functions do little to contribute to institutional goals and priorities, Blackwell and Blackmore (2003) explore the possibilities of strategic human resource development. They suggest that through linking staff development closely to organisational strategy, strategic staff development concentrates on creating an organisational learning culture. In this way staff development helps to shape and develop the organisation where the staff developer goes beyond a training role to that of organisational change consultant. The focus of staff development is on double and even triple loop learning where staff development supports learning on the job, providing mentoring, formal training, reflective evaluative review and planning. This approach allows learning and tacit knowledge to be identified, shared and extended in pursuit of the university's objectives (Blackwell and Blackmore 2003).

Allan *et al.* (2003) suggest that staff development is unlikely to have an impact on institutional development unless there is considerable collaboration between staff developers and subject centres. Proactive and co-ordinated environmental scanning is necessary for the success of strategic staff development approaches, positioning the institution to effectively address any external issues. According to Blackwell and Blackmore (2003), for this to happen, academic staff developers need to form implicit and explicit alliances with the human resources management function and with department heads. Academic developers should be judged then in terms of their impact on practice as opposed to the numbers of participants in their programmes (Boud 1999). Gordon (1995) suggests that effective quality assessment could have a role to play in

aligning academic development with institutional performance. However the literature is not consistently supportive of such an approach, with quality measures bringing much cynicism and criticism from the academic community that associates such external controls with a more bureaucratised approach to teaching and with new managerialism in higher education (Deem and Brehony 2005; Hedley 2010).

Many academic development programmes fail to produce rewards that have “currency within the economy of the institution” as they are invisible to other colleagues and disengaged from the life of the department (Boud 1999, p.8). The literature identifies a number of potential obstacles to the effective delivery of academic staff development. Brew (1995) suggests that the narrow notion of training held by many managers is not adequate if staff development is to achieve its objective of assisting academics in the performance of their institutional roles and in their professional progression. The tendency to focus on activity-based staff development, often with no follow-up transfer into the work environment should be avoided. When staff developers are asked to perform tasks that they feel are outside their remit, or when they are located in an area of the institution that inhibits them to perform in a way that is consistent with their values, problems will arise (Brew 1995). The tension between the achievement of institutional objectives, the pursuit of their own educational research, and meeting the needs of individual colleagues, can affect the potential of academic development to impact on organisational performance (Boud 1995). The difficulties are compounded due to the often short-term funding arrangements and the absence of clear career structures for academic developers.

Staff development should move from being topic driven to being problem driven if it is to become an agent of institutional change (Elton 1995). Blackwell and Blackmore (2003) argue that the emphasis on individual academic staff development must shift towards organisational alignment at both the institutional and departmental levels. This notion is echoed by Boud (1995) who argues that “staff development in any organisation is only valued if it is in accord with the central mission of that organisation” (p.209). Perhaps such alignment could be achieved by using a continuing professional development framework as suggested by Bamber (2009) that links the role and needs of the individual with the strategic objectives of the department and the university. In order to be successful, academic development must be career-linked, with close alignment between reward mechanisms, organisational strategic priorities and the aspirations of staff. The outcomes of development should be readily identifiable as enhancing the performance and the position of the department within the university (Boud 1999).

2.8 Conclusion

An organisation’s workforce is one of its most valuable resources (Tiernan *et al.* 2006). However many texts related to higher education management barely touch on staff development issues which would indicate that for senior management, professional development of academics is not perceived as a major contributor to organisational

performance. The organisational structures to support delivery of professional development are rarely referred to in literature concerning university management with its focus on income generation, internationalisation, globalisation, research output, university rankings *etc.* When mentioned, reference to the necessity for professional development of academics is largely in relation to one particular strategic issue for universities, that of teaching and learning.

Boyer's (1990) influential publication concerning the priorities of the professoriate suggests that the most important obligation confronting higher education at the time was to "break out of the tired old teaching versus research debate and define, in more creative ways, what it means to be a scholar" (p.xii). Boyer's (1990) identification of four categories of scholarship – discovery, integration, application and teaching – by his own admission "divide[s] intellectual functions that are tied inseparably to each other", functions that should dynamically interact to form an interdependent whole (p.25). Boyer's report certainly brought prominence and momentum to the idea of the scholarship of teaching (Huber 2003) and in the years since its publication the higher education sector has seen the establishment of numerous institutional and national centres focused on teaching and learning (Webb 1996a). In Boyer's ambition to postulate a vision of scholarship that recognises, rewards and values the wide range of academic talent, his taxonomy of academic functions may have inadvertently served to further the divide between teaching and research. Several authors acknowledge that much academic development has been narrowed to matters of learning and teaching while professional development associated with research and scholarship is often not perceived as professional development at all (Clegg 2003; Webb 1996a).

Higher education institutions have complex staffing structures where the academic staff category encompasses individuals from a wide range of professional areas. The academic profession itself is complex with the role encompassing a broad range of increasingly demanding responsibilities in research, teaching, administration, entrepreneurial activity, consultancy, community engagement, management responsibilities and so on. The extent to which an academic is involved in any of these roles will vary depending on their position, interest, competence and career stage. It is ironic that higher education institutions, that are so committed to education and learning, have been remiss in their ability to organise themselves to provide formal learning opportunities for their own staff (Boud 1995). Academic professional development didn't feature in the literature to any great extent until the 1990's. In recent decades the many drivers for change in higher education provided an impetus for funding bodies to finance enhanced provision of academic professional development opportunities. The provision quickly evolved from one-off events and series of seminars to the establishment of accredited programmes, but again predominantly in relation to teaching and learning. The variety of models of academic development that evolved in practice is the result of *ad hoc* decisions in relation to staffing and structures, and there remains strong resistance from some academic staff to engage with the development opportunities being offered. The existence of different traditions and approaches to

staff development, the range of discourses underpinning them, and the variability in their success, provides a rich evidence base from which to proceed with this study.

Considering the increasing demands of the academic role and the variety of approaches to academic development, those responsible for designing structures and services for academic staff development have a challenging task. The literature is clear in its message that academic staff development will only be effective if it engages with the strategic goals and priorities of the university. The literature reveals little evidence of strategic, co-ordinated and integrated approaches to the design and delivery of academic professional development. Instead higher education institutions tend to have a more fragmented approach, with staff development activities being dispersed across several administrative and academic departments; an approach that Cervero (2001) warns can result in little demonstrable connection between continuing education and enhanced professional practice. The current absence of a holistic approach to the organisation and management of academic staff development is inhibiting the opportunity for it to both contribute and respond to organisational strategy.

The way in which a university structures the provision of academic professional development will have extensive effects on what academic development problems are perceived and how they are defined, on what professional development options are made available, on the way in which decisions are implemented, and on its contribution to the university's performance. There is a considerable gap in the bodies of literature pertaining to university organisation and management on the potential of academic professional development to achieve organisational goals. There is a dearth of literature that centres around the configuration of academic staff development provision, and the decision making responsibility and authority within the structures in place. There is very little evidence of analysis of the impact of management structures in relation to provision of academic staff development. In the literature concerning academic staff development units, gaps are evident in the disproportionate focus given to activities relating to the teaching and learning function. This body of literature largely ignores the potential of development opportunities in the other key academic roles and responsibilities like research, administration, entrepreneurial activity, consultancy, community engagement, management responsibilities and so on. Considering the importance of professional development to support the growing demands on all aspects of the academic role, a study that focuses on the structures in place to provide holistic academic professional development is long overdue. The next chapter will outline the methodology that was employed in the conduct of this study.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The chapter begins by outlining the purpose of this research study and a brief overview of the literature that defines the area of study is provided. Some gaps in the literature are identified and it is these gaps that lead to the main research questions. The main research question underpinning the study is crafted and is complemented with sub-questions that illuminate the focus of the research. In the interests of clarity, the key terms used within the research questions are defined. The importance of the research questions is highlighted and the extent to which addressing them will make a contribution to knowledge, both theoretically and practically, is outlined.

Having defined the research questions, there are many different ways to approach answering them. Individual approaches are influenced by the researcher's epistemological and ontological standpoint. This chapter shows an appreciation of the main approaches to educational management research and outlines in considerable detail the approach that was taken for this study. The ontological position that framed the study is described. This is followed by an outline of the theoretical framework that was chosen to guide the data collection and analysis stages. The choices that needed to be made regarding the research design methodology are considered and the choice of the case study methodology is defended through an analysis of its strengths and limitations in comparison to the alternative choices.

The choices of data collection methods using the case study approach are considered and the methods that were selected, i.e. interviews and document analysis, are justified through highlighting their strengths and limitations relative to the alternatives. The selection of participants for interview and the approach taken to the interview process is explained, and the rationale for choosing the selected documents is given. An account of how the data will be analysed is also provided. The ethical considerations and principles of good research practice that influenced this research are summarised. Finally, due diligence is given to issues of validity and reliability that arise in the process of carrying out research. The strategies that were used to strengthen the validity and reliability of this work are outlined.

3.1 Purpose of the Research

The prevalence of quality assurance and improvement measures, the collection of student feedback, and the practice of international rankings have all served to shine a spotlight on the practice of the academic profession. Calls for more effective and modern teaching practice, higher research outputs, transparent administrative methods and more student centred approaches to the business of higher education have intensified the challenges of working in a university. Recent policy developments are calling for a more formal approach to the initial preparation and on-going professional development of academic staff. For instance, the European Standards and Guidelines for

Quality Assurance (2009) state that higher education “institutions should ensure that their staff recruitment and appointment procedures include a means of making certain that all new staff have at least the minimum necessary level of competence” (p.17). This statement has been reflected in the national strategy for Irish higher education which identifies an objective that “all higher education institutions must ensure that all teaching staff are both qualified and competent in teaching and learning, and should support on-going development and improvement of their skills” (DES 2011, p.62).

In the context of these developing policy objectives, a deeper understanding of the management of existing provision of professional development for academic staff is important. Furthermore, in the context of diminishing public resources for higher education, and increased calls for better quality of service, it is more important than ever that managers understand the extent to which the investment made in professional development of academic staff is having an impact on the achievement of the university’s teaching, research, and other strategic academic objectives.

The limitations of training or development programmes in dealing with organisational problems has been highlighted in the literature (James 1997) and so it is necessary to understand how managers can channel the on-going development of individual academic staff members more directly and effectively into improving the performance of the university. Three bodies of literature that contribute to an understanding of this topic are those concerning higher education management, academic development, and strategic human resource management in higher education. The previous chapter provided a review of relevant literature and identified a number of critical gaps in existing research. In an effort to address some of these gaps, related research questions have been developed to underpin this study. These are presented in the next section.

3.1.1 Research gaps and research questions

There are considerable gaps in the literature concerned with the professional development of academic staff. One such gap is the tendency to focus on the development of just one aspect of the academic’s role. The scholars that are writing about professional development in higher education are usually looking at professional development in a specific area, like teaching and learning, or leadership. The literature review carried out for this study did not reveal any research that is focused on the holistic range of development opportunities that are available to academic staff, including that which relates to teaching and learning, research, engagement, and administrative duties. Neither did it find any research that focused on professional development from the perspective of the university management. The literature concerned with university management and organisational performance, by and large, pays very little attention to managing the provision of professional development for staff. It appears to make no reference to the extent of the university’s investment in professional development provision or in the potential of this activity to enhance the performance of the organisation. The literature does not adequately address what organisational structures, management practices, or budgets are required to support the breadth of areas in which academics require development. Furthermore there is very little

evidence of literature that addresses academic staff development holistically from the perspective of the Irish higher education sector. Much of the literature on academic professional development is concerned with bottom-up approaches to organisational change through enhancement of teaching practice, and is dominated by authors whose primary role involves academic development in the area of teaching and learning. While existing literature, emerging from Ireland and elsewhere, has provided considerable insights into the ways of improving individual practice, particularly in terms of teaching and the scholarship of teaching, it rarely extends to address the resulting improvement of overall university performance.

To address some of these gaps the following central research question has been formulated to underpin this study:

How can the provision of professional development for academic staff be optimised to enhance university performance?

The primary objectives of the study are to:

- Develop a better understanding of the range of ways that professional development of academic staff is currently organised and managed in universities in Ireland;
- Develop an understanding of how and why academic staff engage with the development opportunities in their universities;
- Identify ways in which the professional development of academic staff can contribute to the performance of the university;
- Make recommendations on how formal offerings of professional development to academic staff can be better organised and managed to enhance university performance.

In the context of these objectives it is important to provide clarification on what is meant by some of the terminology used. Reference to ‘professional development of academic staff’ is used to encompass all the formal offerings of development opportunities made within the university that contribute to the development of the academic in their full range of professional roles, throughout their academic careers. ‘University performance’ refers to the achievement of the teaching, research, and other academic goals as set down in the institutional strategic plan.

The following sub-questions have been formulated to advance the objectives of the research:

- How do universities organise and manage professional development of academic staff and why do they do it in this way?
- How, and why, do academic staff engage with the available professional development opportunities on offer in their university?

- How does an academics engagement with professional development help them to contribute to the achievement of university strategic goals?
- How should the formal offerings of professional development to academic staff be organised and managed to enhance their impact on university performance?

These questions are very important, particularly in the context of increasing demands on academic staff and depleting financial resources. Addressing the central research question and related sub-questions makes a valuable contribution to the bodies of literature on university management and academic development.

This study sets out to provide clarity on the organisational structures that are in place to support the development of academic staff in two Irish universities. This exercise will illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of both approaches. It will result in a number of practical recommendations on how these two universities might go about improving existing approaches so that they will gain more tangible results for their investment in the development of academic staff. It is intended that the findings from these case studies will facilitate university managers in the wider context to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the organisational structures supporting academic development in their own university and to make any necessary reforms to maximise the return on their investment in this area.

This study provides academic developers a wider lens within which to focus their work. For individual academic staff, it is intended that the findings of this study can be used as a compass to help them to navigate the professional development opportunities on offer in their own context. It may help them also to be more strategic about their professional development choices. This study is important in the contribution that it makes to the existing literature on academic development. It identifies two models of professional development provision for academic staff that exist in the Irish university sector. It considers the historical development and organisational management of these models, and based on their combined strengths and potential, it makes recommendations for their enhancement.

The central research question and related sub-questions assume that if structured appropriately, the development of academic staff can contribute to university performance. Not all researchers would agree that there is an optimal approach to the delivery of professional development. For instance, Webb (1996b) argues that the area of development is not a unitary concept for which there can be a perfect model. He argues that the word development and the activities it implies are discursive and can be interpreted according to various ontological and epistemological standpoints. Notwithstanding that point, this study argues that better models of professional development for academic staff can and indeed should be postulated by researchers. That is not to say that there is one optimal model for all universities, but that there are ways to optimise existing models to enhance their effectiveness. The next section will outline the ontological standpoint underpinning the research approach.

3.2 Research Approach

In any research study it is important to be clear about the philosophical position of the investigator, as this will impact on their approach to the research including the methods used to collect and analyse data. Critical realism is the philosophical position that best describes the ontological standpoint of this study.

3.2.1 Critical realism

Roy Bhaskar is the philosopher accredited with having given a coherent philosophical language to critical realism (Danermark *et al.* 2002). Bhaskar believes that we can only understand and change the social world if we identify the structures at work that generate events and discourses. Critical realism differs from naïve realism or objectivism, which holds that it is possible to attain a correct and objective picture of reality. It differs from constructivist and relativist perspectives which argue that all knowledge is socially defined and so it is meaningless to claim that one statement about reality is more truthful than another. It also differs from the positivist tendency to make universal claims to truth.

Like positivism, realism suggests that the natural and social sciences should apply the same types of approach to data collection and analysis. Both perspectives are committed to the view that there is an external reality that is separate from our descriptions of it. Realists believe that the scientist's conceptualisation of reality is simply a way of expressing in thought, that reality which is independent of thought. Critical realists use hypothetical entities to account for regularities in the natural or social order (what Bhaskar calls generative mechanisms). The natural world differs from the social world in that the natural world has regularities that appear to be invariant. This is not the case in the social world where the consequences of human agency mean that there are no certainties only probabilities. The critical realist perspective is very appropriate for my study in that "identification of generative mechanisms offers the prospect of introducing changes that can transform the status quo" (Bryman and Bell 2011, p.17). The nature of society, being an open system means that it is impossible to make predictions, but based on analysis of causal mechanisms it is possible to conduct a well-informed discussion about the potential consequences of mechanisms working in difference settings.

A critical realist approach does not exclude any method *a priori*, but the choice of method is predicated on what the researcher wants to know, and what can be learned from different methods. Our thought reality is socially produced, and therefore research concerns the study of other people's interpretations of the social world. The methodological consequence of taking this understanding of reality is that my inquiry at all times is tentative, provisional and open to revision. My understanding is presented only as a possible reading, and not a definitive or exclusive account of an objective reality. The purpose of the research is to discover, or reveal, something about reality that is not yet known, something that cannot be observed without considerable effort. The research results aim to build up theories that can be incorporated into a broader conceptualisation of reality.

3.3 Research Design

There are many choices to be made in designing the research project. Tactical choices need to be made regarding the framework to guide the collection and analysis of the data. A useful starting point is the identification of theories that can be used as frameworks for interpretation of data and as tools to identify the properties of phenomena, events and structures relevant to the project (Danermark *et al.* 2002). This section outlines the theoretical framework underpinning this study. An account of the research methodologies that were considered is provided and the methodology that was selected is described in more detail.

3.3.1 Theoretical framework

James (1997) acknowledges the complexity of universities as organisations. They are particularly intricate networks in which the operational knowledge is stored among many people and in which communication is multi-directional. He argues that “in the face of such dispersed knowledge and an environment of uncertainty, gains in effectiveness require the conditions for inquiry and learning to be optimized rather than placing trust in established principles or administrative fiat” (p.35). James (1997) suggests that staff development and training programmes are strategies for organisation improvement and that optimisation of staff development efforts should be one avenue by which universities respond to the challenges ahead.

This study seeks to explicitly link the professional development programme for academic staff with the performance of the university. The literature review underpinning this study largely focuses on bodies of literature concerning university management, organisational performance, and academic development. The identification of gaps in the existing bodies of literature informed the central and sub-questions for this study, and underpins the research investigation.

The central research question is an important one in the context of the increasing challenges facing higher education institutions today. The effectiveness of academic staff development is critical, and yet as James (1997) notes, it is regularly the subject of concern “with claims that resources are not focused, activities are peripheral, and goals are not met” (p.40). The total investment in professional development is significant as it includes the salaries of the academic developers, overheads, the resources and refreshments provided at events and the *pro rata* salaries of the participants. This investment, like any other significant investment, should be expected to provide a tangible return (Rummler and Brache 1995). The mission of any development exercise should be to improve performance, and the influence of development activities will be limited if they are not well structured. Conversely, if an organisation effectively approaches determining, designing and evaluating training and development needs of staff, the investment should provide a tangible return (Rummler and Brache 1995).

In order to investigate how the provision of academic professional development can be optimised to enhance university performance, it is necessary first to understand how

professional development is currently organised and managed within the system. The work of Rummler and Brache (1995) provides a useful framework for the analysis of staff development efforts. They describe the work of organisations in terms of systems, where every organisation is made up of layer upon layer of systems. By peeling an organisation layer after layer one can reach an understanding of how it operates, and more importantly the variables affecting its performance, at any level of detail. Rummler and Brache (1995) maintain that by gaining an understanding of the nature and dynamics of the systems at the organisation level, the process level and the individual level, design improvements can be implemented that will have the maximum positive impact on the organisation's performance. This organisation as systems model is a useful framework for the analysis of data from my study as it enables an understanding of the variables of professional development that influence university performance. Additionally it provides a framework to examine how these variables can be adjusted so that performance is improved on a sustained basis (Rummler and Brache 1995).

3.3.2 Methodologies considered

There are no perfect research designs but many design principles do exist to help researchers to select and employ the most suitable methods for addressing their research questions (Patton 2002). Research methods must suit the object and the purpose of investigation, and the practical logic between object, purpose and method must be carefully considered (Danermark *et al.* 2002). Decisions about the design, measurement, analysis, and writing up of research should also flow from the purpose of the inquiry (Patton 2002). The purpose of this research study is to reveal how universities in Ireland organise and manage professional development of their academic staff, and to make recommendations on how formal offerings of professional development to academic staff can be better organised and managed to enhance university performance. The primary audience for the findings are the university management teams and those responsible for developing and delivering professional development opportunities for academic staff. The study will also provide some useful findings to guide individual academic staff in their professional development journey. In designing this study, a main concern was to choose a methodology and data collection methods that are most likely to answer the research questions, and thus achieve the research objectives.

Studies in management, social sciences, and education, have centred on research methodologies ranging from: grounded theory approaches, narrative, life histories, testimonials, biographical methodologies, ethnographies, action research, phenomenological traditions, and case study approaches (Anderson 2009; Bryman and Bell 2011; Cohen *et al.* 2011). Each methodology follows its own logic in the collection and analysis of empirical evidence for exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory investigations (Yin 2009). Notwithstanding their distinctive characteristics, there are many overlaps among the methods used for each.

A number of research designs were considered for this inquiry and the case study approach was thought to be the most appropriate for answering the research questions.

For instance, a survey design would not be appropriate as there would be no guarantee that the desired participants would complete the survey. Additionally, it would not be possible to ask the same volume of questions of participants as they would be less likely to give the necessary time to answer them in the required detail. Moreover, as highlighted by Bryman and Bell (2011) a survey design would give no opportunity to probe research participants, and it would therefore not be conducive for the depth of investigation proposed here. An ethnographic design on the other hand would allow for a deep inquiry, but the extent of observation and immersion involved in such a research strategy would be neither necessary nor appropriate for this study. Having considered the respective merits and limitations of other methodologies, it is clear that case study methodology is the one that best suits the object and purpose of this investigation.

3.3.3 Case study research methodology

Case studies are a popular choice for many of the social science disciplines, and for doing work in professional fields including business, public administration and education (Yin 2009). Some of the most successful studies in business and management research are based on case study design (Bryman and Bell 2011). Gerring (2004) highlights that researchers can mean different things when they refer to their work as case study. For Gerring (2004), a case study is an in-depth study of a single unit, for the purpose of understanding a larger class of similar units. The unit is a phenomenon that is observed at a particular point in time over a distinct period. The number of cases used in a case study can range from one to many. The case study method is a particular way of defining cases and not to be misunderstood as a way of analysing cases or of modelling causal relations. Case studies can use qualitative methods or quantitative methods, and they can be experimental or observational, synchronic or diachronic.

It is appropriate to use a case study when the inquiry, like this one, proposes to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in depth, within its real-life context. The case study method allows the identification of weaknesses in a system, and to demonstrate methods that work well compared to other methods (Wallace and Wray 2006). It is a highly appropriate method to use to investigate the 'how' and 'why' type questions that have been crafted for this study (see Appendix 1), particularly given that these questions deal with contemporary events over which the investigator has little or no control (Gerring 2004; Yin 2009).

There are four key options for conducting case study research as outlined by Yin (2009):

- Single Case study using a single unit of analysis
- Single Case study using multiple units of analysis
- Multiple case study using a single unit of analysis
- Multiple case study using multiple units of analysis

This study comprises a single unit of analysis, which is the university's professional development programme for academic staff. Two cases, i.e. two universities were

selected for the investigation making this research project a multiple case study using a single unit of analysis. Replication logic underlies the use of two case studies where similar results are predicted in each case. Two cases are sufficient to enable a comparison and contrasting of findings and if both cases produce the same findings, then the findings can be considered more reliable and valid and the research design more robust (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2008; Yin 2009).

A number of factors were considered in the selection of the two case studies. There are seven universities in the Irish higher education sector. The two universities selected are ranked third and fourth in Ireland in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings. Being in the middle ranking categories means that they represent the average performance levels of an Irish university and those universities above them and below them in the rankings can well relate to them. Being an employee of one of these universities is an advantage to the researcher as it gives a wealth of knowledge and an incomparable access to interviewees, thus ensuring that a great depth of study can be achieved. Access was not a determining factor in choosing the second case study, as similar access levels could have been achieved in any of the universities. For its similarity in age, in size, in organisational structure, and in its place in the rankings, University B was considered as ideal to enable comparison and contrasting of findings. University B was of particular interest also given that it is the only university in Ireland with a Vice President for Innovation and Performance. This new role, with its focus on university performance was particularly appealing given the objectives of this study.

Like all methodologies, the case study approach has its limitations. Case study research has attracted much criticism as a research strategy. There are concerns in the literature about its perceived lack of rigor. Yin (2009) suggests that such criticisms about rigor may be appropriately attributed to individual research projects where the investigator has not followed systematic procedures and where bias has been allowed to contaminate the findings. Bias and sloppy procedures can influence the direction of all empirical inquiries if the investigator is not careful to follow systematic procedures. In the same vein, when carried out appropriately case studies can demonstrate as much rigor as any other method.

Another common concern regarding case studies is that they take a long time to complete, and that they can culminate in lengthy unwieldy documents. This criticism may be warranted given the traditional lengthy narratives that have been the result of some longitudinal case study research, and particularly when ethnographic methods like participant observation are employed. However there are many examples of high quality case study research projects that did not take a very long time to carry out and that were written up in a comprehensive manner.

A limitation of case study research is its potential for generalisability. Just like experiments, case studies do not represent population samples. Therefore the goal of the research is towards the expansion and generalising of theories, but with no necessary intention to generalise to a wider population. As Yin (2009, p.15) puts it, case studies “are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations”. This study does

not attempt to produce representative results across a population or to generalise findings to all professional development programmes or to the entire higher education sector. The objective is to contribute to the international body of literature some case examples of professional development models from the higher education sector in Ireland, and to generate some findings of practical value for the two institutions studied. The findings may be relevant and have potential implications beyond the local contexts but they are not expected to have adequate reliability to be generalised.

3.4 Research Methods

There is an incorrect tendency to associate case studies with qualitative research only. While qualitative methods are often favoured by exponents of the case study given their ability to generate intensive and detailed examinations of a case, quantitative methods are also frequently used (Bryman and Bell 2011). Indeed evidence for case studies can appropriately be drawn from qualitative or quantitative approaches, or a mix of both. Commonly used data collection methods include: documents, archival records, interviews, observation, physical artefacts, and surveys (Yin 2009). Case studies would typically use more than one source of evidence. The selection of any given method should be contingent on their relative strengths and limitations in relation to the research question, the control the researcher has over behavioural events and the focus on contemporary as opposed to historical phenomena.

The use of a survey was deemed inappropriate for my study given its limitations in the collection of in-depth insights from targeted participants. Observation and participation methods demand significant time and immersion in the organisations being studied (Bryman and Bell 2007) and were also deemed as inferior methods for this particular study when compared to using interviews and documents. Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information according to Yin (2009). Additionally he argues that documentary information is relevant to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources and due to their overall value they have an important role in data collection for any case study.

3.4.1 Data Collection - Interviews

There are many types of interview methods: they can be individual or multiple, structured, semi-structured or unstructured. While multiple person interviews or focus groups have many positive attributes, they could not offer the same depth of insight into a topic as individual interviews. Personal information and experiences may be withheld from a focus group discussion, and certain personalities may take over the discussion. It was therefore decided to use individual interviews. These can be structured or unstructured. Less structured interviews are a widely employed method in qualitative research and were the method of choice for this study. Semi-structured interviews were deemed the most appropriate method for eliciting interviewees' perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations, and constructions of reality in relation to professional development and university performance. For certain descriptive and analytic purposes,

the long interview is a powerful instrument of inquiry. This method permits the researcher to enter into the mental world of the interviewee and to see the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It allows the researcher to develop a chain of evidence for the research, which will enhance its validity (Yin 2009).

As with every method, the interview method has its limitations. Interviews have been criticised for their potential to report inaccuracies due to poor recollection, and bias due to poorly constructed questions (Yin 2009). Research findings may be affected by the way that interviews are conducted in different cases. Different levels of rapport with the interviewees for instance may affect the extent to which they will speak openly and fully about a given issue. To guard the validity and reliability of the interview data, the same interview protocol was used for each interview as suggested by Sobh and Perry (2006). The same level of formality was maintained with all interviewees throughout the process. Additionally interviews were recorded and transcribed to preserve the chain of evidence as advised by Yin (2009).

For this study twenty-three interviews were conducted. Candidates were selected for interview based on their role or potential role in the professional development process. Details of interviewees are shown in table 3. Candidates represented three specific levels of the university – organisation, process and individual. In University A six interviews were conducted with senior managers in the university who are members of the University Management Team (UMT). This cohort represented those with responsibility for university strategy, finance, quality, teaching and learning, and research. In University B two senior managers were interviewed, the Vice President for Innovation and Performance and the Director of Quality. Interviews were requested with the Registrar and Deputy President, the Vice President for Research and the Director of Strategy, all of whom suggested that it would be more appropriate to interview the Vice President for Innovation and Performance or the Staff Development Manager, given the nature of the research. At the process level, four interviews were conducted in University A, and five in University B. These interviewees were selected for their role in the planning and actual delivery of professional development opportunities and included Directors of Centres for Teaching and Learning, Staff Development Officers in HR, Heads of Information Services and Librarians. At the individual level, three academic staff were interviewed in each university. These were selected for their capacity to provide perspectives as consumers of professional development in the institution. The selection of academic staff endeavoured to represent a range of disciplines and to represent a range of career stages and levels. Early, mid and late career academics were interviewed, working at levels ranging from academic below the bar to professor. In each case, the late-career academic was also a Head of School.

Table 3. Interviews conducted

University A	University B
Organisational Level (University Management Team (UMT) Members)	
Vice President Teaching & Learning	Vice President for Innovation & Performance
Vice President Research	Director of Quality
Director of Strategic Planning	
Chief Financial Officer	
Former Vice President	
Director of Quality	
Process Level (Academic Development Providers)	
Co-Director of Centre for Teaching & Learning (a)	Director of Centre for Teaching & Learning
Co-Director of Centre for Teaching & Learning (b)	Staff Development Manager (HR)
Staff Development Manager (HR)	Staff Training Officer (HR)
Head of Information Services	Head of Information Services
	Librarian
Individual Level	
Early-Career Academic	Mid-Career Academic (a)
Mid-Career Academic	Mid-Career Academic (b)
Late-Career Academic	Late-Career Academic

An interview guide was drawn up in advance of the interviews (Appendix 1). The interview questions were derived from the central and sub research questions. The interview guide was designed to bring structure to the interviews and to ensure that the interview process was replicable as necessary. The semi-structured approach ensures the comparable coverage that is fundamental to the analysis phase, yet it allows sufficient flexibility for the interview to flow in a fluid and open manner, to gather additional data

where the opportunity arises, and to omit questions that become irrelevant in the process of the conversation.

The interview guide included general questions for all candidates and specific questions for specific categories of staff. The semi-structured format provided the flexibility to direct or steer the conversation to specific lines of inquiry as relevant. This means that some questions were omitted in particular interviews, depending on the candidate's role in the professional development process or on their individual responses. The order of questions also varied depending on the flow of the conversation. Where new relevant lines of enquiry were identified during the interview, additional questions linked to the research area were raised. All interviewees, with one exception, consented to having their interview recorded and later transcribed. Where possible, interviews were conducted on a one-to-one, face-to-face, basis. However due to availability of participants and scheduling challenges it was necessary to conduct some of the interviews by phone. All interviews were conducted in line with good practice (as outlined for example by Anderson 2009; Bryman and Bell 2011; and Jepsen and Rodwell 2008).

The initial part of the interview focused on gathering information on the organisational structures in place to support the delivery of professional development opportunities for academic staff. It uncovered the number of departments and staff that have a role to play in the delivery of professional development for academic staff. It focused on the way in which these departments interplay with each other to coordinate the range of events and activities organised. Once the topic of the structures and processes was satisfactorily covered, the technique of laddering, using why type questions, was used to reveal the interviewees perceptions of the strengths and limitations of the existing provision. Laddering down techniques, as recommended by Easterby-Smith *et al.* 2008, were also employed to obtain illustrations and examples as deemed relevant to the research objectives.

The interview method proved very effective in fulfilling the objectives of this study. It facilitated the development of a clear understanding of the organisational structures in place, in each university, to support the delivery of professional development opportunities for academic staff. The interviews were also useful for gathering information about the strengths and limitations of individual institutional approaches to professional development provision, as perceived by the providers and consumers of the service. It revealed some patterns regarding the way in which academic staff engage with the professional development opportunities offered. Moreover, the interviews revealed interviewees perceptions on the ways in which the existing provision of professional development could and should be optimised to enhance the performance of the organisation.

3.4.2 Data Collection - Documents

The interview data is complemented with analysis of internal university documents as a secondary data source and to enable triangulation. Documentary evidence is a

particularly important source of evidence in research related to business, management, HR, and education issues (Anderson 2009; Bryman and Bell 2011; Cohen *et al.* 2011). Documents can provide specific details about relevant activities and can be usefully employed to corroborate and augment evidence from the interviews. Documents collected and analysed for this study include the university's strategic plan, strategic plans of relevant units within the university, quality review reports of relevant units, and relevant published material relating to provision of academic staff development opportunities. Documents and policies relating to the promotion of academic staff were also included. Documents were selected for their capacity to answer the research questions and to fulfil the objectives of the research. These documents are used to acquire a better understanding of the existing structures in place to support professional development and also to triangulate the interview data where relevant.

The documents relating to professional development provision were used to build up an understanding of the full extent of formal offerings of professional development that are made available to academic staff. These documents were also used to build up an understanding of the structures in place to facilitate the delivery of professional development provision for academic staff. The university's main strategic plan was examined to reveal the indicators of university performance. Where available, the strategic plans of units that typically provide professional development opportunities for academic staff, like human resources, the centre for teaching and learning, and information services units were examined to uncover the extent to which professional development is linked to the indicators of university performance as presented in the university strategic plan. Where available relevant quality review reports were examined to uncover the extent to which recommendations regarding professional development are linked to university performance indicators. Policies regarding academic promotion were examined to identify the extent to which contribution to university performance indicators is considered in academic career progression. The documents collected provided useful data in their own right, and additionally they were used to triangulate data from the interviews.

3.4.3 Data analysis

The data collected for this study was in the form of text comprising interview transcripts and relevant documents. This is rich data but lends itself to the main challenge of case study research, which is data analysis. As acknowledged in the literature this challenge is particularly prevalent when qualitative methods are used. The data collected for this study were analysed in accordance with good practice procedures as outlined by Bryman and Bell (2001), Yin (2009), Anderson (2011) and Cohen *et al.* (2011). Data were analysed separately for each case.

The data analysis stage is the search for explanation and understanding and so the analysis began during the data collection phase and was undertaken as an iterative process. The first stage in the process was the reduction of data into manageable proportions using thematic analysis. The broad themes or codes used in this stage were derived from the theoretical framework that guided the data collection stage. The codes

used were Organisation Level, Process Level, and Individual Level. These codes incorporate the three levels at which professional development provision is managed, delivered and consumed. The three levels also reflect where professional development is expected to impact. Sub-coding was the next stage of analysis where descriptive codes, analytical codes and axial codes were used to further reduce the data. Descriptive codes were used as an initial categorisation of data. Segments of data were then assigned analytical codes, which went beyond the descriptive phase to assess the data for meaning. The analytical codes identified broad themes, topics, concepts and ideas. Key themes emerged under each of the levels. At the organisational level three key areas of importance emerged: structures to support professional development provision, locus of responsibility, and finance. At the process level the dominant themes were the methods of selecting and delivering formal offerings of professional development, communication, record keeping, and evaluation. At the individual level the dominant topics of interest to the study included, what constitutes professional development, how academics engage with professional development, and career progression. Performance and potential for improvement were used as codes at each of the three levels. Axial codes were used to identify relationships and connections within categories and sub-categories of data. These codes were helpful in identifying tensions, dependencies and frustrations at each of the levels of the organisation. This stage was used to highlight links between professional development and performance, and for highlighting strengths, weakness and areas for improvement at each of the levels. To help the process of sense-making, data were displayed and interpreted using lists, typologies, matrices, and logic models. Although many of these were not used in the eventual presentation of the findings they were very helpful to the investigator in interpreting the data, in deepening the understanding of emerging themes, and for identifying relationships and cause and effect patterns.

The case studies were presented separately providing a depth of relevant knowledge for each. A cross case analysis was then undertaken to compare and contrast findings and to show the level of their generalisability. The cross case analysis provided explanations for the combined findings and was useful to deepen the understanding of both. This was an opportunity to link the combined findings of the case studies to the four objectives of the study, demonstrating that the objectives had been met and that the research questions satisfactorily answered.

3.4.4 Ethical Considerations

The ethical principles and ethical codes of good conduct of the University of Bath (2011), the Sociological Association of Ireland and that of British Education Research Association (BERA) (2011) are broadly consistent. Taken together these guidelines enable the researcher to consider all aspects of the process of conducting educational research and to reach an ethically acceptable position in which the methods are sound and justifiable. These ethical principles and codes largely concern the protection of the research subjects, the prevention of bias, and the need for accuracy through honesty, transparency and correct representation of research findings. In their analysis of nine

well-known social research ethics codes, Bell and Bryman (2007) also identified these broadly similar categories of ethical principles. The BERA guidelines recognise that the vast majority of educational research activity may be non-problematic, and this study can be considered as one that does not raise any major ethical concerns. Nonetheless, it is important to outline the ways in which ethical guidelines were observed in the conduct of this study.

This study respected the ethical guidelines of the University of Bath, those of the Sociological Association of Ireland and BERA. The research was undertaken with an ethic of respect for the participants involved, their universities, the knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research, and academic freedom. Ethic of respect for the people involved was demonstrated through seeking their voluntary informed consent to participate in the research. An email was sent to each participant with a document attached outlining the nature of the research, a description of the interview procedure, an explanation of the way in which the data would be used, a statement assuring confidentiality and offering the participant a right to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Consistent with the BERA (2011) guidelines, participants were informed about the process they were invited to engage in, including why their participation was desirable, how the information would be used, and how and to whom it would be reported. No material incentive was offered to participants to engage in the research interviews. The right of participants to withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason was made clear from the outset. In an effort to minimise the impact on participants' workload, every effort was made to restrict interviews to no more than one hour duration. In recognition of participants' entitlement to privacy, they were accorded their rights to confidentiality and anonymity. In the representation of findings, the universities are not named but are referred to as University A, and University B. Interviewees are not named, and any reference to them is made through giving a general indication of their place in the organisation with respect to their role in professional development provision. Comments from different individuals from the same layer of the organisation are differentiated through use of letters which were randomly assigned after the broad title, for instance participants will be referred to as UMT Member (a), Academic Development Provider (b) etc. A very limited amount of personal data was collected, and this was stored and used in compliance with the legal requirements of the Irish Data Protection Acts (1988 and 2003).

As an employee of one of the universities studied, it is important to acknowledge the potential impact of this on the research. It is acknowledged that conflicts of interest and affiliation bias can potentially influence the way research issues are defined as well as the presentation of findings (Bell and Bryman 2007). Any potential of such bias in this research was mitigated through the accurate, honest, and transparent presentation of findings, without bias for any individual or institution. In the case of both universities there were interviewees with whom the investigator already had a good rapport and some with whom there was no prior acquaintance. Each interviewee was treated equally throughout the process. All received the same details about the research in advance of scheduling the interview. In cases where an interviewee was known to the researcher, a

level of formality was maintained through asking interviewees to answer the questions as if they had been asked by a relative stranger to the university. It was indicated to them that they should participate in the interview with an assumption that the researcher had no prior insight into the workings of their university.

In respect of the responsibilities of this researcher to the research community in general, this research was conducted to the highest professional standards and poses no risk to the reputation of educational or management research.

3.5 Limitations

Every research study is limited by the characteristics of design or methodology that can impact the application or interpretation of the findings. Some of the limitations of this study have already been acknowledged in the previous sections. Studies can also be influenced by the theoretical framework used to interpret the data collected. The Rummler and Brache (1995) framework used for this study suggests that an investment in professional development should be expected to provide a tangible return. It claims that through gaining an understanding of the nature and dynamics of the systems at the organisation level, the process level and the job/performer level, design improvements can be implemented that will enhance the organisation's performance. This framework supports the central research question and related sub-questions which assume that if structured appropriately, the development of academic staff can contribute to university performance. Not all scholars would agree that there is an optimal approach to the delivery of professional development. For instance Webb (1996b) argues that the area of development is not a unitary concept for which there can be a perfect model. However, this study did not set out to design a perfect model for delivery of professional development. It set out to propose how existing models can be enhanced. This is a reasonable objective as there are many criticisms of existing models and approaches and it is a valid contribution to the literature to have findings that lead to recommendations for better ways of organising and managing professional development provision.

This study necessitated the collection of in-depth insights from targeted participants at three levels of the organisation, from university management, professional development providers and from individual academic staff. All forms of data collection have their limitations and these had to be weighed up. While the use of a survey would have potentially reached a wider range of participants it would not have been appropriate for collecting the rich data required for this study. Three separate surveys would have been required and there is no guarantee that the targeted participants at each level would have responded. Focus groups were considered but were discarded as they are not suitable for collecting data on personal experiences of professional development. Also the potential for specific personalities to dominate the discussion was a real possibility and would have limited the usefulness of the findings. Observation and participation methods would potentially work to collect the rich data required but the limitations in terms of access and potential demand on time render it inferior to the interview method

combined with documentary analysis, which was chosen for this study. The interview method is not without its shortcomings. The potential for bias due to question construction and reliability on individuals to speak openly and honestly is acknowledged. To an extent the expertise of the investigator and level of rapport with the interviewees can impact the quality of the data collected. To minimise the potential limitations, the conduct of the interviews and subsequent analysis of the data collected was well informed by good practice in the literature and prior experience of the investigator. The data was complemented with analysis of relevant documentation, which also allowed for triangulation of data from the interviews.

The number of participants interviewed can impact on the relevance of the findings. For this study three levels of participants were interviewed. At the organisational level the people targeted were those that are responsible for setting organisational performance goals. In University A, interviews were conducted with the Director of Strategic Planning, the Chief Financial Officer, the Vice President for Research, the Vice President for Teaching and Learning, the Director of Quality and a former Vice President. Although an effort was made on the part of the investigator, it was not possible to conduct interviews with the same number of staff at senior management levels in University B. Interviews were conducted with the Vice President for Innovation and Performance and the Director of Quality. The Registrar and the Vice President for Research were invited to participate but declined. It could be argued that the study would have been enhanced with wider levels of participation from senior management in University B, however, given the consistency of responses from senior officers in both universities, it is felt that a satisfactory level of saturation was reached and that more interviews would not have led to different findings. At the professional development provider level of the organisation, the Heads of the three main units in each of the two universities were interviewed. However at the individual academic level it could be argued that the number of interviews conducted was relatively small and much less representative than at the other two levels. Three academic staff members were selected for interview in each of the universities. Additionally those representing other levels of the organisation, but with an academic role, were asked to comment on their experience of the professional development provided. Academics at early-career, mid-career, and late-career stages were interviewed, and they represented a range of disciplines including Humanities, Sciences, Engineering and Business. A greater insight into the academics experience of professional development provision may have been gleaned had more academics been included. It may also have been possible to identify patterns in experience by discipline or category of staff. However, this study set out to investigate how the current provision works and how it could be enhanced and it was felt that sufficient data was collected from academic staff to support this objective.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

The quality of a case study design is predicated on its construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (Yin 2009). When qualitative methods are employed the essential criteria for quality are credibility, neutrality or confirmability,

consistency or dependability, and applicability or transferability (Lincoln & Guba 1985, cited in Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007). To meet these criteria the research must have fidelity to real life, it must be specific regarding context and situation, and be authentic and honest (Cohen *et al.* 2011). Every research study has to deal with multiple threats to internal and external validity. These threats occur during the three design stages of the research process, i.e. the data collection, analysis, and interpretation stages.

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) developed a comprehensive Qualitative Legitimation Model, which they compiled from the work of several researchers. Informed by this model, several strategies were employed to mitigate threats to the validity and reliability of this case study. The use of multiple data sources and theories to inform the case study allowed for triangulation. Triangulation is a common safeguard employed in qualitative research as it reduces the possibility of threat due to biases of specific methods and allows greater confidence in interpretations. Every effort was made to avoid the potential for researcher bias. Throughout the stages of this case study the research questions were kept firmly in mind. A conscious effort was made to ensure that prior knowledge of any participants did not contaminate the research process or the findings. The threat of researcher bias was reduced through declaration of professional or personal affiliations that may influence the research and cognisance of the need for accuracy through honesty, transparency and correct representation of research findings. Ethical considerations were borne in mind at all times.

Reactivity of participants, whereby participants may exaggerate or withhold information due to rivalry with other institutions, was another threat to be avoided in this study. To mitigate against this threat the purpose of the study was made clear to all interviewees and the value in providing accurate and honest responses was explained. Furthermore all participants engaged in the research on a voluntary basis, they were guaranteed anonymity and given the option to withdraw at any point. A common threat to qualitative research is the inappropriate generalisation of findings. For this study findings are comprehensively compared to the literature so that results are placed in a realistic context. Interpretation of findings are presented only as insights into particular processes and practices within the specific cases examined. Findings are only generalised to theoretical propositions and not to populations.

Throughout this research project, the processes of member checking and peer debriefing were employed. The research Supervisors were frequently debriefed and asked for feedback at regular intervals. Additionally a critical friend was engaged to take the role of critiquing the research. This strategy is considered as highly effective in eliminating the possibility of misrepresentation and misinterpretation as it serves to minimise the potential threats to internal and external credibility of the research (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007). While it is not possible to guarantee absolute validity and reliability of the case study, it is important to assess the process, interpretations and conclusions for truth value, applicability, consistency, neutrality, dependability, credibility, confirmability, transferability and generalisability (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007). By using strategies which were informed by the literature to tackle the various threats it is expected to

increase the validity and reliability of this study at the three stages of data collection, data analysis and data interpretation.

3.7 Conclusion

This study is concerned with investigating the provision of professional development by universities for their operating core. It is an important area of study and one that is not given adequate attention in the literature. The critical realist philosophical approach is adopted for this study. This approach encourages the conduct of a deep investigation of causation and its links to social events and experiences, and is appropriate to meet the objectives of this study. While this approach does not support predictions to be made, it offers the prospect of recommending changes that can transform the status quo, and allows a well-informed discussion on the potential consequences of such changes. The inquiry is tentative and at all times open to revision. Several methodological approaches were considered for this study. The case study approach using qualitative methods, despite its limitations which are duly acknowledged, is considered the most appropriate for the conduct of this study. The unit of analysis is the university's formal professional development programme for academic staff. Two universities have been carefully selected for the investigation to enable comparison of findings. The use of two cases will strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings. The findings of each of the case studies are presented in the chapters following.

CHAPTER 4. CASE STUDY UNIVERSITY A

4.0 Introduction and Background

University A was founded in 1845 and has grown to be one of the larger universities in Ireland, now boasting close to 18,000 students and more than 2,500 staff. The total number of academic staff exceeds 1,200, with over 500 of these being contract research or specialist staff. The university is growing and planning for continued growth, particularly focusing on increasing international and postgraduate student numbers. A broad range of disciplines is offered in University A covering Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business, Law, Engineering, Architecture, Science, Food Science, Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Nursing and the Clinical Therapies. Degree programmes are offered from undergraduate honours level right through to postgraduate doctoral levels. Additionally the university's adult and continuing education department offers a range of special interest programmes and accredited diploma programmes. The university has a number of large research centres specialising in Micro Engineering, Alimentary Health, the Environment, and Marine Energy. University A is currently ranked at 210 in the QS World University Rankings and third of seven in Ireland in the THE World University Rankings. The organisational structure comprises a Governing Body, Academic Council and Academic Board, and two University Management Teams, one smaller team focused on strategic matters and one concentrating on operational matters.

In its strategic plan University A has articulated an ambitious goal to be Ireland's leading university and to sustain its position within the top two per cent of universities globally. Over the next three years the university intends to focus on gaining financial sustainability, delivering high quality research-led teaching, growing part-time and flexible learning provision, developing an accredited business school, strengthening research capacity, internationalisation, and regional engagement. The university has clearly laid out a range of strategies and projects that will be undertaken over a three year period to meet each of the five broad goals articulated. The specific measurable targets or deliverables that the university aims to achieve under each goal are articulated in the plan.

This case study examines the model that is in place to deliver formal offerings of professional development for academic staff working in University A. Inspired by the Rummler and Brache (1995) framework, the case study focuses on three different systems levels: organisational, process and individual. Starting at the organisational level, the structural, management and financial arrangements that are in place to support professional development provision are detailed. Moving then to the process level, the methods used by the dominant professional development providers to select and deliver professional development are outlined. Finally, perspectives of individual academic staff on the professional development that is available to them are provided. The case study closes with an outline of the extent to which professional development of academic staff can contribute to the performance of the university, from the perspectives of all interviewees.

4.1 Organisation level

Senior managers in the university were asked questions about the structures that are in place to support the professional development of academic staff, the locus of responsibility for staff development and the extent to which the university invests in this area. The objective of the questions was to develop a better understanding of the range of ways that professional development of academic staff is currently organised and managed in the university.

4.1.1 Structures to support professional development provision

The interviews and documents that were analysed reveal that opportunities for professional development for academic staff are provided by at least ten separate units in the university. These include, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, HR, Library, IT Services, Quality Promotion Unit, Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies, the Research Office, Health and Safety, Language Centre, Careers Office, Student Counselling and Development, as well as individual academic departments. A summary of the range of formal professional development offerings of these units and their respective reporting lines is illustrated in figure 1. Excluded from this illustration are the additional one-off information sessions which are offered by a number of service departments including the International Education Office, Admissions Office, Finance Office, etc.

Figure 1. Model of Professional Development Provision: University A

Reporting to	Vice President Teaching & Learning	Director of HR	Director of Information Services	Vice President Research	Various Reporting Lines
Provider	Centre for Teaching & Learning	Human Resources	Information Services (Library & Computer Centre)	Research Support Service	Various Other Units
Professional Development Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate Qualifications in Teaching & Learning • Standalone modules (credit-bearing) • One-off sessions on relevant topics • Individual & Group Consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation • Editing and Proofreading • Mentor and Mentee training • Supporting students in distress workshop • Project Management • Leadership • Performance Management • Interview techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing Information • Academic Writing • EndNote • Finding Literature • Reviewing Literature • ECDL course • Social media courses • Training sessions on Microsoft Office, web updating, image editing, Blackboard VLE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Seminars on finding funding • Writing proposals workshops • Citation impact seminar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervising Research • Health & Safety • Quality assurance and improvement • Language Skills • Research seminars • University policies and procedures

The fragmented nature of the provision of professional development is perceived as suboptimal by senior management in the university. When asked about the structures that are in place for delivering professional development for academic staff, interviewees had the following to say:

“It’s far from optimum... I think the organisation of it is quite haphazard and ad hoc I’d have to say. I think there is a lot of scope for improvement...”
(UMT Member (a))

“I would say generally it could be a lot better. I would say it is ... haphazard and unstructured and I would say if you were an academic you could be lucky or unlucky to get it and you would have to kind of go looking for it and digging for it to get it...”

(UMT Member (b))

“They don’t really interact... the Research Office does its own thing... HR have gone their own way, do their own thing, they just decide what they are going to do and the teaching and learning people, more or less, go their own way...”

(UMT Member (c))

“There isn’t a structural system in place to actually propagate, support, encourage, enhance training for staff”

(Head of School)

The professional development provision in the university is clearly fragmented. A contributing factor to the current structure is the organic nature of its development over time in a traditional university cultural environment.

“I think it’s just through how the organisation has developed and evolved organically... I mean we are a very traditional organisation in the sense that it’s grounded in... history... and I think that’s part of what contributes to the way we are at the moment for sure. I mean organisational development is only kind of a role that was added to HR, you know, about three or four years ago ... as a concept it’s not one that has kind of really evolved at all...”

(UMT Member (a))

In this traditional university there appears to be a culture of resistance to change. The current set up, with more than ten units providing professional development provision has created complex silo structures. Each unit is concerned with protecting their own role and they are not willing to relinquish to any other provider.

“It is just complex, so we have committees and units ... there is delivery happening through any number of different medium, which makes it complex ... there is a certain amount of kind of empire building or empire protecting and people just saying you know, we do what we do and we are not for changing.”

(Academic Development Provider (c))

Despite the fact that the strategic plan includes “to enable all staff to reach their full potential” among the five strategic priorities of the university, the perception among interviewees is that the university lacks a genuine commitment to achieving this goal. A number of the senior managers interviewed indicated that while the university recognises the potential of professional development, it doesn’t extend to managing it effectively.

“I would say that it is an espoused priority but it is not a managed priority. Of course it is a priority, everybody will say it’s a priority, nobody will say it’s not, but when you look at the evidence in terms of activity across the university ...

activities that we all espouse and support are very often the ones that we neglect”

(Academic Development Provider (d))

The range of professional development available to support academics in their diverse roles is imbalanced, where support of the research role features least. In recent years the Research Office provided development opportunities for academics; there is a will to do more, but the range of opportunities is limited due to a lack of resources.

“Our problem here is that we don’t have enough people to do it because it’s very time intensive...we need resources to do it. In our game it is spending a lot of time with people and it is one-to-one a lot of it ... We do as much as we can...but it’s just the more resource we have, the more impact we can have ... It’s only scratching the surface. We would love to be doing more of it.”

(UMT Member (e))

Those providing professional development are not always clear about what they should be doing to meet the university’s expectations or objectives. They are meeting demands from all quarters and some would welcome guidance on where they should focus their direction. It was suggested that the university strategic plan should serve as the compass to guide the units that are providing professional development.

“Things come from the bottom-up and the top-down and sometimes there is, you know, we need a compass more in there and of course that’s supposed to be the strategic plan which is meant to be the roadmap to guide us.”

(Academic Development Provider (b))

The extent to which professional development provision is embedded in the objectives of the strategic plan is limited by the confidence of the professional development providers in the strategic planning process.

“The strategic plan of the day may be myopic in the light of the college and the group that’s constructing it so that’s why I think you need a literature beyond that ... a strategic plan can be the road mapping that can take you down a cul de sac.”

(Academic Development Provider (b))

The available professional development provision has many identified strengths, but by and large it is perceived that it is not focused on helping staff to deliver the university’s strategic objectives.

“We are good at the delivery of the training and development which is what I would call more skills based than anything else. You know, how to use Word, how to use Cochrane’s evidence base in medicine, how to use Endnote. And it is less attuned if you like to let’s say the strategic plan that we have at the moment.”

(Academic Development Provider (d))

It was suggested by interviewees that greater collaboration across the providers of professional development would make for a more coherent service to support academics. Furthermore it was strongly suggested that, as with other priority areas for the university, a senior member of staff should be given responsibility to ensure that the professional development objectives are achieved.

4.1.2 Locus of responsibility

Tensions between HR and the Centre for Teaching and Learning emerged when ‘training the trainers’ funding became available from the Higher Education Authority (HEA) (the funding and legislative body for higher education in Ireland) in the mid-nineties. The then Chair of the Staff Enhancement and Professional Development Committee (SEPDC) argued that it would be inappropriate for HR to take on the role of professional development in the area of teaching and learning and a decision was taken to establish a dedicated Centre for Teaching and Learning. Currently in University A there are many units delivering one-off information sessions, seminars and workshops across a range of thematic areas on an *ad hoc* basis. Interviewees considered that there are three main providers: the Centre for Teaching and Learning, HR, and the Information Services department (which incorporates the Computer Centre and the Library). The Staff Enhancement and Professional Development Committee (SEPDC) was mentioned as playing a role in informing staff development initiatives but it does not assume a coordinating responsibility.

When asked where the locus of responsibility for coordinating professional development of academic staff should lie, one professional developer was in two minds. Initially she indicated that HR would be the most obvious coordinating hub of professional development for the university. However, her lack of confidence in their approach to professional development led her to conclude that she would feel “*safer*” with the Centre for Teaching and Learning taking primary responsibility for coordinating professional development for academic staff. However, if the Centre for Teaching and Learning were to take a coordinating role, she was concerned that it should not “*go too much down the service route*” for fear of losing its identity and its academic research focus on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

The HR unit is well aware of the caution with which its involvement in professional development in academic domains is held.

“There is always an anxiety like for HR to get more stuck in there, it is never really helpful, when it comes to academic development I would say. Like it works much better if HR is in the background. So you could say should we be there at all, I don’t know, that is a much bigger question. Some would argue that staff development shouldn’t be a HR unit at all, whether it is for academic or the rest of the staff categories.”

(Academic Development Provider (c))

Other interviewees echoed that it would be inappropriate for HR to lead professional development for academic staff. Some suggested that HR is “*too bureaucratic*”, others suggested that HR would use a “*training model*” that would be inappropriate for academic staff development. It was acknowledged that the Staff Enhancement and Professional Development Committee (SEPDC) has a role to play in coordinating staff development provision, but the difficulty with it is that the Chair of this committee at any given time assumes a different level of authority. Consequently the various providers of professional development don’t feel answerable to this committee.

“The person who chairs SEPDC at any given time, is kind of volunteered into a role like that and I mean I suppose they can assume authority for some of that kind of stuff but if they started writing to the Computer Centre or me or [the Centre for Teaching and Learning] saying, you know, please provide me with full details of all your activities, I am not sure they would get a very nice response.”

(Academic Development Provider (c))

It was argued that there is merit in continuing to have a range of centres taking responsibility to deliver formal professional development opportunities appropriate to their area of expertise, but that one person should have oversight to ensure that there is coherence in the available provision.

“I think a diversity of offerings is useful, so that one doesn’t get channelled into some kind of straightjacketed staff development that is a model that suits one group...but you need somebody who is looking, overseeing those groupings.”

(Academic Development Provider (a))

This suggestion that the diverse range of units should continue to take responsibility for delivering professional development opportunities, appropriate to their own area of expertise was commonly expressed but there was a perception that Heads of Departments must also share responsibility to ensure that academic staff are adequately engaging with professional development. It was suggested that the Performance and Development Review System (PDRS), which was introduced by HR in recent years, should be used by the Head of Department to help their staff to navigate the professional development opportunities on offer and to encourage them to avail of those that are most relevant to their development needs.

“The centrally managed initiatives are not getting through because it is just hitting the wall of noise ... quite innocently I might not be aware of the right things, but you know, not hearing it through the right channel. One more direct channel is a departmental one.”

(Mid-career Academic)

The close cooperation of the centrally managed professional development initiatives with the Heads of Departments was postulated as a good model. However a strong theme emerged that one champion needs to be appointed to have oversight, and

responsibility for ensuring that the range of professional development opportunities on offer is coherent, and that it is adequately serving the needs of staff and of the university. The following response reflects that of most of the interviewees.

“If you just had somebody like, whether it would be at VP level or whatever ... who had the authority to call in all the committees and all the units and all the professional staff like me and say you know, what are ye doing, where are ye at, where are the gaps, who is going to pay for it... each of the units at the moment does its best and in many respects, it is doing very well in making sure that within their own area of provision, they are making adequate provision and good provision a lot of the time. But the gap is that nobody is saying across the board, are we happy and is the balance right and are we channelling the funding in the right areas.”

(Academic Development Provider (c))

Some interviewees proposed that the Vice President for Teaching and Learning should be the “*champion*” of academic professional development, and that housing responsibility under this Office should not mean that professional development related to the academic roles outside of teaching get any less attention, “*It is a question of ensuring that the ‘Office’ if you like, has sufficient understanding of its holistic university wide role.*” (Academic Development Provider (d))

The difficulty associated with making one person accountable is that impact is largely dependent on the personality in the role and their appetite for the work. However, it was strongly suggested that the institution should not let individual personalities dictate the priorities and that the university needed to be stronger with senior management when objectives are not realised.

“But you can’t let things drift into personal predilection either. You know, you have to go up to the strategy level and to identify the projects ... what tends to happen in institutions like this is somebody comes in, the institution expects them to do this, they don’t deliver; they deliver in another area which is relatively acceptable and that’s the way things go forward interminably. So the institutional priority has suddenly subsided and it becomes subservient in many ways to another.”

(Academic Development Provider (d))

It was suggested that the ‘champion’ of professional development would be tasked with reporting on the impact of the professional development initiatives and ensuring that there is a return on the university’s investment in professional development provision.

4.1.3 Finance

There was little awareness among interviewees about the cost of professional development provision to the university. None of the senior managers interviewed were familiar with the costs involved. They were then asked their opinion on what proportion of the university’s budget would be appropriate to allocate to professional development

of academic staff. The lack of consensus in responses infers that this subject is not one that has been given much attention at senior management levels.

“The number that came to my head when you asked was 10%, I don’t know why, but that was the number that immediately came into my head.”

(Head of Department)

“There should be a few thousand per year for an academic staff member...through good times and bad, because in my view there should always be an investment in people because through difficult times that’s what will help you recover is people”

(UMT Member (a))

“You would easily need something like between, dare I say, €500 and €1,000 euro a year per staff member.”

(UMT Member (d))

It was suggested by one interviewee that each of the four Colleges that are using the services of the professional development providers should pay 5% of their budget to fund the services. According to another interviewee, the overall development budget should be proportionately divided to support development activities for teaching, research and engagement as follows:

“Teaching is a big part of what we do, maybe half of your support staff would go into driving that and research is the bit that gives us payments, so maybe not quite half but something close to it and reaching out to the outside world I think is about 10% or 15%, so it might be 50/35/15...something like that”

(UMT Member (e))

A topic that has had much attention of senior management is the development of online and distance learning, evidenced by the placement of the ambition “to improve the provision of Technology Enabled Learning ... and build a greater blend of distance and on-campus learning” as a priority in the university strategic plan. Despite its prominence in the priority projects of the university, a lack of clarity regarding the sources of funding to support professional development provision related to teaching and learning with technology was evident. This particular area of professional development involves provision of support from many departments of the university, the computer centre, the audio visual department, the library, the centre for teaching and learning, and each of the departments contribute to the costs of providing development opportunities in this area. However, there appears to be a lack of clarity regarding management of the overall budget for development under this theme.

“It’s not clear where the money comes from for initiatives we have to carry out. So we are going to support staff in more courses to do blended and distance learning, which means developing digital resources and structures and marketing courses. So we are looking around to see where we can get that money from ... Some of it is coming from the ...IT Services, some of it is coming

from...the library, some of it is coming from [the Centre for Teaching and Learning], a little bit from the President's strategic fund. So, nobody quite has a handle on it. Nobody is able to say, 'this is the amount of money we have, therefore this is how it is going to be spent.'"

(Academic Development Provider (a))

The primary providers of professional development were asked to give an estimate of their annual spend and while some providers were very clear on their pay and non-pay costs, other providers were not able to put an approximate figure on their units spend in relation to professional development provision.

The representative from the HR department did not give an indication of what HR spends on professional development provision. It was indicated that the budget is "small enough", and that it is supplemented with some residual funding that will be used up in the next year or two. Beyond this huge concerns were expressed about how HR will be able to continue with their professional development activities.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning also indicated that they have some residual funding which has almost come to an end and additionally they are allocated approximately €24,000 per annum by the HR department. Most of the sessions take place during lunch time and approximately €20,000 per annum is spent on providing a light lunch to participants. Stipends are paid to the internal staff who regularly deliver sessions for the centre. These staff are given the title of 'Teaching Fellows' and are allocated the stipend to support their own professional development. A portion of the funding is also used to facilitate the Co-Directors own professional development via attendance at an annual international conference and participation in relevant national events and conferences. The Co-Directors shared a sense that the amount of funding allocated to the Centre from the university's core budget is totally inadequate and disproportionately lower than that of their counterparts in other universities. Both indicated that the Centre is expected to be pro-active in generating its own funding, through provision of services to other higher education institutions, or through applying for research grants.

The Computer Centre and the Library were clear about their spend related to professional development provision. It was indicated that the Computer Training Centre spends approximately €90,000 on pay costs and €50,000 on non-pay costs. In contrast, no specific budget is allocated by the library to staff professional development. The professional development interventions provided require Librarian's time and occasionally that of Library IT, but are otherwise cost neutral for the library. In staff time, it was suggested that six subject librarians spend approximately eighty per cent of their time each working on development activities with academic staff.

Piecing together the information on professional development costs provided by interviewees, and combining it with the actual costs in 2012 as provided by the University's Finance Office, the approximate annual spend on provision of formal development opportunities for academic staff in University A is estimated in table 4.

Table 4. Estimate of annual university spend on professional development of academic staff (in thousands of euro).

Unit	Number of staff (Full-time equivalent)	Pay Spend	Non-Pay Spend	Total Spend
Centre for Teaching and Learning	3	223	146	369
Computer Training Centre*	2	18	10	28
Library	4.8	239	23	262
HR	2	100	59	159
Research Office	3	197	4	201
Academic Departments (training and development budget)	0	0	533	533
Total Spend	14.8	777	775	1552

*The Computer Training Centre estimated that academic staff make up approximately 20% of total staff accessing professional development in the Computer Centre; therefore amount estimated is 20% of the total pay spend of €90,000, and non-pay of €50,000;

At just over 1.5 million euros, the university spend on professional development of academics works out at approximately two per cent of academic staff pay costs. Of course, this estimate of costs in table 4 does not include some of the complex hidden costs, for instance overheads and the time of the academic staff being developed. However this exercise of estimating costs is a useful starting point when thinking about the proportion of university spend on professional development of academics.

In general interviewees did not appear to have clarity about the costs of professional development to the university. Even some of those that have responsibility for the budgets in the units that are formally tasked with delivering staff development were challenged to provide clarity around their annual spend. The vague responses to the questions regarding appropriate costs and budget allocations would support the notion that professional development of staff is more an espoused than a managed priority for the university.

4.2 Process Level

This section will give an insight into the workings of the main units providing professional development for academic staff, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, HR, Computer Centre, and the Library. It will outline the focus of the provision in each unit and will clarify the processes used by each of the units to set and deliver their professional development agenda.

4.2.1 Selection and delivery of professional development sessions

The Centre for Teaching and Learning delivers a combination of accredited programmes and one-off development sessions. The open sessions take several forms from one-off seminars, workshops, lectures, role-plays, creative interpretation, peer-review, poster sessions and conferences, and sessions can last from one hour, to one day. A range of factors influence the provision of professional development that is made available by the Centre for Teaching and Learning including government strategy, university strategy, available funding, the interests and expertise of the Centre's own staff, and fortuitous links that are made with internal and external experts in relevant areas that are willing to come and deliver a session.

It was suggested that the professional development offerings that are influenced by the “*top-down*”, or by the strategic plan, include those related to curriculum design, and teaching and learning with technology. The themes chosen for the open sessions are chosen on the basis of themes found in the research related to teaching and learning in higher education; they are also influenced by student needs, which are identified by having “*an ear to the ground*” for the issues of the day. The President, Heads of College, relevant Committees, the strategic plan, quality reviews and relevant university performance indicators were all identified as factors that influence themes for the professional development programme. Often the themes are suggested by the person volunteering to deliver the session.

Accredited modules and courses offered by the centre are delivered by and large by staff of the centre. These courses range in duration and include a one year Certificate, a two year Diploma and a three year Masters programme. There is also an accredited programme on teaching with technology. This takes the form of an online Epigium course for which the Centre has purchased a licence. This course can be taken by staff in their own time and is supplemented by the Centre with some face-to-face sessions delivered by the Centre's staff and by the Learning Technology Unit of the Computer Centre.

There is some level of collaboration between the Centre for Teaching and Learning and HR, in that if HR identifies a need for professional development that can appropriately be delivered by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, they would financially support the Centre to design something to address the identified need. The HR unit takes responsibility for the administration of professional development initiatives like sabbatical leave, fee concessions for university level programmes, study leave, training leave, exam leave and the travel grant (which is currently suspended). Additionally HR designs and delivers a range of policy or compliance based professional development including sessions about staff recruitment and selection, training regarding the Performance and Development Review System (PDRS), and sessions about going for probation and establishment. Furthermore a number of training courses are organised for academic staff including orientation for new staff, editing and proof reading, mentoring, supporting students, management practices, leadership, and interview techniques. It was suggested that the topics of professional development offered by HR

tie in reasonably well with the university strategy, with some provision targeted at helping staff to achieve their full potential, and other provision supporting the research agenda. Although they are strategic priorities of the university, it was acknowledged that there are no development opportunities targeted at the university's internationalisation agenda, or at income generation. It was suggested that the Project Management training that was planned would help those that are tasked with managing a project in the university's operational plan, to succeed.

While staff of the HR Unit tend to deliver the development sessions related to implementation of university policies, specialist companies are contracted to deliver the majority of their professional development courses, or one-off sessions. The payment of external companies for delivering these services emerged as a point of frustration for several interviewees, with many of them indicating that insufficient use is made of internal expertise.

With regard to the library, the types of professional development offered are largely focused on the research role of the academic. Topics of development include training in the use of particular software like, Endnote, a range of citation analysis tools, literature databases etc. They also provide an information literacy skills course to help academics to enhance the quality of their research skills. The objective of the range of services on offer *“is particularly designed to enhance the individual teaching and research performance of each academic staff member, thereby enabling them to make a strategic contribution to the performance of the university”* (Academic Development Provider (d)). The library professional development sessions are normally delivered in small groups. Additionally the library facilitates one-to-one requests for support and advice around research and publishing as requested. Support is provided as required in the context of each discipline's needs, and it was suggested that the development needs vary widely by discipline.

While the library provides an ample range of professional development opportunities for academic staff, it is not considered as a separate entity within the Library. There is no specific budget allocated to professional development and the work is not formally evaluated. It was suggested that there is great potential within the Library to provide further development opportunities for academic staff as the expertise, resources and facilities are readily available. However it emerged that professional development was not currently included in the strategic objectives of the unit, and thence it is not strongly resourced.

A range of professional development opportunities related to use of information technology are provided by the Computer Training Centre; courses include social media, website management, lecture recording, Blackboard, and the full range of Microsoft Office programmes. The provision of the Computer Training Centre aims to help academic staff in the administration of the job (using Office, Email, Social Media) or in the delivery of their teaching (using Blackboard, Panopto, PowerPoint). Academic staff are also trained on the use and management of the university's website. The programmes delivered by the Computer Training Centre staff are delivered face-to-face.

There are also a number of training manuals available that staff can download and use for self-development.

4.2.2 Communication

All providers of professional development have a role to play in communicating what they have on offer and in encouraging academics to avail of their services as appropriate. The three primary professional development providers use a range of methods to communicate what sessions they have on offer. The Centre for Teaching and Learning relies heavily on the email system to communicate details of their upcoming sessions. The open sessions of the Centre for Teaching and Learning are run weekly and two to three emails are sent announcing and reminding staff about each session. Details of open sessions are also published on the Centre's webpage, usually with about one month's notice of upcoming topics. HR have an online handbook detailing the types of sessions that they have available. The details of each session are sent by email normally two weeks in advance; reminders are also sent. The details of sessions are added to the HR webpage once they have been organised. The Computer Training Centre also publishes their own handbook detailing the range of professional development opportunities on offer. The Computer Training Centre tends to have the times and topics of their training sessions set out at the start of the academic year and the timetable of their development events is available on their website. Periodically an email is sent informing all staff of the upcoming sessions.

Interviewees revealed that the use of emails as the primary communicator of upcoming development sessions is not effective. Too many emails are being sent about the many disparate sessions on offer and the temptation for the target audience to simply delete the email is very high.

"Now an email these days is worth whatever its worth.....it gets blitzed among many other emails ...That [email] doesn't mean a whole a lot, because most of us need a little cajoling into what it is, why it is a good idea to do it etc."

(Mid-career Academic)

The HR website was described by one academic as the *"hub for staff training and development"* and is the page to which this interviewee refers when seeking development opportunities. However she indicated that the HR webpage is not very user-friendly and that it is not always clear what opportunities are available.

"One has to do a bit of looking and digging to find what they need. It is not always clear and I think there is an emphasis ... on management and very much on leadership which ... wouldn't be all that I need."

(Early-career Academic)

It strongly emerged that more should be done to clearly communicate the full range of professional development opportunities that are available throughout the year and that it would be beneficial if staff were more directly targeted to attend as relevant.

4.2.3 Record keeping

All the primary professional development providers keep their own records of attendance at the sessions they organise using sign-in sheets. However there is no central log capturing the full range of professional development activity being provided by the university.

“So there is loads happening that nobody is capturing or at least, they are capturing it but maybe not reporting it into a central suppository for all of that and it is just being lost and that would be true across the board for all staff categories. But I think for us as an organisation, it is disappointing because it means we can’t say, actually we do give you all of this and we can prove it with the numbers.”

(Academic Development Provider (c))

It emerged that none of the professional development providers have analysed their attendance records to identify trends in uptake over time, for instance in terms of age and gender profiles, category of staff, discipline, seniority, or trends by individual profile in terms of frequency of attendance, preference for topics and so on.

4.2.4 Evaluation

Each of the primary professional development providers uses participant feedback sheets, that they design themselves, to evaluate their professional development sessions. It was suggested that the feedback gathered is used to inform and enhance future provision.

It was suggested that the university should establish professional development as a formal project in the university’s operational plan. In this way professional development would be firmly put on the agenda of the university at the highest level and somebody would be tasked with reporting on progress and evaluating impact in this area.

“That measurement dimension which would be at the end of the flow chart would have to be a very visible part of a project plan. So I think that documenting the university’s expectations and then the means by which it is going to do it and the means by which it is going to manage the delivery and then the measurement. It is all part of the one continuum.”

(Academic Development Provider (d))

The suggestion was that one senior person should be given responsibility to deliver on the professional development agenda and that they should consider it as a project which needs to be managed.

4.3 Individual level

The questions asked to interviewees within the academic staff category focused on their experience as consumers of the university's professional development provision. The objective was to develop an understanding of how and why academic staff engage with the available development opportunities.

4.3.1 *What constitutes professional development?*

Throughout the process of interviewing it emerged that there is no clear consensus among interviewees regarding what constitutes professional development.

"I am not sure everyone knows what professional development means ... if you stopped someone on campus and you asked them what it was...everyone would have a different definition of it ... I only actually kind of realised this, I was helping a few people fill in post-doc forms ... and they have a big section on, How will you manage your Professional Development, and people were emailing me saying, 'what do they mean, Professional Development?'"

(Early-career Academic)

In this academic's experience, when completing the section of the research grant form that pertains to engagement with professional development, colleagues displayed a concept of professional development that centred around their professional duties or achievements.

"I think what I saw people putting into that particular box on the grant form, was not what they were looking for. They would put in, 'I published an article,' 'I went to a conference and spoke at a conference,' 'I organised...'"

(Early-career Academic)

For many academic staff professional development is a very individual experience. It can be perceived as getting a PhD, publishing an article, attending a conference, presenting at a conference, keeping up with the latest relevant publications etc. There were varying interpretations of what professional development means in the context of the research role. Some indicated that the support provided by the Research Officer to apply for grants was a form of professional development and others suggested otherwise. One academic described her definition of professional development as follows:

"To my mind staff development is actually helping me to learn new skills and to identify new skills that I might have, that I haven't yet identified myself....I suppose it is a way of introducing me to ideas or concepts that I haven't yet considered and ways of working that I haven't considered. So for example, if I go to a forum or class on teaching and someone says to me have you thought about teaching in this way? I would consider that a form of development."

(Early Career Academic)

For some academics there is a distinct difference between ‘training models’ and ‘developmental models’ in professional development provision.

“[HR] saw it as training, we saw it as more professional development in the more holistic sense of having reflective capacity ... whereas they saw it as, you know, like giving quick tips and tricks for giving a lecture on how to do group work, how to teach a large group and a small group. They were surprised that we thought there might be more to it than that. You were supposed to do these sessions then at the beginning of the term let’s say, you know, in September and then that would be it, that’s the professional development done for the year! I was saying like ‘What about the conversation, the community of practice and of learning and nurturing?’”

(Academic Development Provider (b))

This difference between ‘training’ and ‘development’ was an issue for several of the academic staff interviewed.

“I have been on so many of these courses, where somebody comes in and says ‘this is how you do it!’ like they have the answers, and for me by definition a university should not be a place that has the answers, it should have big questions and kind of working answers while we are moving towards a better way of doing things. ... I found the terminology and the concept [of training] seriously disturbing in a university.”

(UMT Member (d))

It was suggested that academics perception of professional development is very much individually focused and less organisationally focused and that it would benefit the university if something were done to bridge that understanding. The provision of professional development for academic staff serves a two-fold objective, the professional development of the individual and their improved performance which enhances the university’s objectives. The extent to which the provision should focus on the individual’s needs or the university’s needs was a question put to some interviewees. The responses were consistent. It was felt that the institution’s needs and the individual’s needs in a well-functioning organisation should align. The organisation should identify the areas of weakness and where development of staff will help to achieve better performance.

“What the organisation needs and what the individual needs might kind of dovetail. I don’t think they would be too different ... the university can shine light into areas that are maybe a little bit weaker or maybe need development ... yeah I think professional development that is good for the university probably should be good for the individual as well.”

(Early Career Academic)

It was suggested that the professional development provision should be “connected to the real world” of academics, that it should serve the institution first and the individual

second. Three interviewees suggested that academics should not be allowed to use the institution in a self-serving way just to further their own career ambitions.

4.3.2 Engagement with development opportunities

When asked to talk about their own engagement with formal offerings of professional development of the university, many of the academics interviewed had the perception that they availed of little or no formal professional development. On further probing it emerged that this was indeed the case for some, but for others it transpired that they had engaged in a wide range of professional development opportunities, but that they had not identified them as such. For instance one interviewee - a late career academic - who first indicated that she did not avail of enough professional development opportunities offered by the university later divulged that the university funded her to attend around ten summer schools, at least one international conference annually, some relevant conferences nationally every year, and periodic participation in writing retreats. She had also attended development opportunities offered by the university's Computer Centre, some workshops from the Careers Office, and some sessions that were organised by HR. Additionally she had benefited from sabbatical leave to work on her PhD which had been sponsored by the university.

One interviewee expressed disappointment with her experience of the professional development provision in the university. This interviewee was fully aware of the range of professional development provision on offer and makes an active effort to engage with it; however the available provision does not meet her skills development needs.

"I started off my contract with a wish list of what I would like....the skills I would like to develop and the things that I would like to sort of broaden my knowledge of for the period of the contract, but I do find that I have to engage with those opportunities as they come along and they don't always come along and sometimes when they do, they are full or are they are a one-off or whatever ...there are things that I would like to do that I can't do ... so for example I am really interested in digital humanities and I am working at the moment with an archive and I would like to kind of maybe digitise parts of that and I don't have the skills to do that."

(Early-career Academic)

Many of the academic staff interviewed indicated that the professional development that they had engaged in externally, for instance participation at conferences, summer schools, or in distance learning programmes, were more impactful for them than the development opportunities they engaged with internally. It was suggested that the university travel grant, which is currently suspended, facilitated them to engage with important professional development opportunities. The opportunity to present at international conferences was cited as a very important development opportunity as it brings a sense of value to the academic's work that they don't necessarily get in their own institution.

Informal, tacit forms of professional development experienced in the day to day work were cited as significant for many academics. For instance it was suggested that engagement with committees involved a lot of preparation in terms of reading documentation and this contributed to professional development. Preparing for meetings, networking, sharing of ideas, and engaging in peer reviews were all deemed as important forms of development by academic staff. The experiences of teaching, of being a reflective practitioner, and of reading relevant publications, were also cited as forms of professional development.

The Performance and Development Review System (PDRS) system was referred to by some interviewees as a tool which could be used to clearly articulate and pursue their development needs. Some of the interviewees had participated in performance reviews; however their experiences of this process varied from positive to negative.

A number of barriers to engaging with professional development opportunities were identified. The most prominent of these was time. When email communication of an upcoming development event appears in the inbox of a busy academic, often it is simply deleted.

“Hit the delete button. Yeah most of the time to be perfectly honest, because (a) it is a question of prioritisation and I think in some sense the demand that is on our time is that it is the next problem you have to solve rather than giving sufficient time to development”

(Head of School)

It was widely expressed that the additional administrative responsibilities in recent years are particularly time consuming and inhibit the academic from achieving higher level university goals. It was argued that the role of the academic is becoming increasingly complex and demanding and that with the current levels of pressure on academics to manage their day to day workload, the expectation that they should increase their research output and generate more income for the department is unrealistic. It was suggested that more administrative support should be given to academics to free them up to achieve the higher level university goals and if they need to engage in professional development to help them to achieve these goals that they have the time to do that. Conscious of the increasing difficulty academics have in finding the time to engage in professional development during the working day, the HR department bought an on-line leadership course for a specific group of academics to undertake. However, the HR representative acknowledged that their initial foray into on-line provision has not been successful.

Another barrier to academics engaging with the available development opportunities in University A is lack of awareness. Some of the academic staff interviewed had very little knowledge of the professional development provision available to them, this despite them being in the institution for more than a decade. One individual interviewed was not able to name any professional development opportunities that were available, he found that there was no visibility of such provision and neither had he sought it out.

On further probing it transpired that he had attended some professional development sessions on leadership that were provided by HR, but he had not considered them as professional development events. The reason he participated in the event was that he got a specific, personal invitation to attend. He expressed that individuals are more likely to attend a professional development session when they are personally invited or when a colleague that has attended recommends it.

Some academics perceive that their colleagues don't engage with professional development courses provided by the university because of their belief that such events are for academics who have "*too much time on their hands*" (UMT Member (d)). This is a cultural perception that is evident in particular departments in University A.

The professional development currently on offer by the university was not perceived by interviewees as tailored enough to up-skill academics appropriately so that they can meet the university's expectations. It is perceived as random, both in timing and in topics. According to one Head of School, "*it doesn't look like somebody sits down and says 'actually we need this menu of things'*". It was suggested that the university should put in place more focused, formal and relevant professional development opportunities and that there should be an expectation for academics to engage. This would provide the incentive to attend and would help academics achieve their own research goals and to meet those of the university.

4.3.3 Professional development and career pathways

It emerged that professional development does not feature as something that is important to engage with for some academics, until they are thinking of applying for promotion.

"When a promotion opportunity comes up and in the cold light of day, you sit down to look at that, your application and you go, hang on, you need to be able to talk about what you have been doing to develop yourself. I don't know how the evaluation panels work, but certainly shining the light on my own case and my own profile, I was realising that there is a big gap there. "

(Mid-career Academic)

This academic mentioned that in his ten years in the university, this was his first opportunity to apply for promotion and he expressed a sense of disappointment that he didn't understand the importance of engaging with professional development sooner.

"Yeah, so that cold shower came very late! ... You need to be crafting that over years, building up those things, all those profiles, doing some training, some development work and gradually building up that profile. It is no good at year zero going where is my teaching development now?"

(Mid-career Academic)

The academic staff interviewed perceived that the professional development available in University A is not clearly linked with career shaping. It was suggested that better

guidance should be available on what development opportunities are important for career progression.

“We are certainly not made aware at graduate level or formerly at post-doctoral level of the stages that you need to go through to kind of progress if you want to be a professor or if you want to reach the top of your profession or career. There isn’t clarity...”

(Early-career Academic)

“I would definitely benefit from more assistance with shaping of career. I am new to this. I come from industry, so I don’t know how to shape an academic career properly ... I think people are very unguided.”

(Mid-career Academic)

Individual academics expressed, by and large, that they get more valuable advice regarding their career progression informally from peers and from people that they regard as mentors, than from formal development opportunities. The following were credited with having voluntarily taken on mentoring roles for the academics interviewed: PhD supervisor, former Head of Department, current Head of Department, university President and Vice President. Interviewees strongly hinted that success in the academic career can be attributed more to serendipity in finding someone who takes on a mentor role for you, than to professional development, the words “*luck*”, “*fortuity*” and “*serendipity*” were widely used in conversations around career progression.

Many interviewees suggested that they would welcome the university taking a more formal approach to mentoring through the engineering of more networking events. However, a word of caution should be noted from one interviewee that in cases where mentoring is engineered, it does not always work effectively. It can be perceived as a box ticking exercise if there is not appropriate oversight of the mentoring system.

4.4 Professional development and university performance

Interviewees suggested that the link between professional development goals and university goals were in the areas of research output and rankings, teaching rankings and the student experience and the ambition to be the best, or achieve recognition in particular discipline areas. One early career academic identified a clear link between professional development goals and university performance goals:

“I think one of the goals of the university is to deliver education to more people in non-standard ways, non-linear ways and I think that is one way in which professional development can sort of help staff to do that ... different ways of teaching, different ways of learning, different ways of delivering education ... I think all of that can be enhanced you know, in very easy ways ... I suppose one of the other ways is internationalisation, that sort of raising the profile of the university, what the university does, what is unique about the university, the kind of research we are doing. Maybe by focusing on what staff can do to maintain

their profiles online and all of those things that people are a little bit nervous about that need to be maybe demystified. It could be done very simply and very cost effectively and very gently as well."

(Early-career Academic)

The university has set out the key performance indicators for teaching and learning, for research and for engagement, for internationalisation and income generation. However, what the professional development providers deem as indicators of success of their programmes does not always align neatly with the university goals.

For instance, the Centre for Teaching and Learning perceives themselves as an academic centre whose research focus is teaching and learning in higher education. Not all of the Centre's performance indicators align with the university's priorities for teaching and learning. The mismatch between what the university strives to achieve and the objectives of the Centre was acknowledged by the Co-Directors. To have increasing numbers of staff carrying out and disseminating research related to the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is a key performance indicator for the Centre for Teaching and Learning; however this is not an activity that is highly valued by the university. The most recent quality review report on the Centre suggests that more weight must be placed on "meeting current high-level, institutional needs". The report states that the focus of the Centre should be on equipping "as high a proportion of teachers as possible" with a Certificate in Teaching and Learning, suggesting that those who wish to further pursue the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning through Diploma and Masters programmes should "be facilitated to take modules available in other institutions". It suggests that the Centre do more to develop staff in meeting organisational goals around teaching with technology, improving retention, and internationalisation. The report indicates that the changes in teaching as a result of this development will "eventually [be] reflected in institutional reputation (which is part of rankings)".

To further explore the link between professional development and university performance, each of the primary professional development providers were asked about their indicators of success and how these align with achieving university goals. It was suggested that when staff engage with professional development opportunities in the Centre for Teaching and Learning it has a positive impact on the performance of the university. The impact is a subtle incremental change in the approach to teaching, which in turn enhances the students learning experience:

"Feedback from people saying that they have changed something in the class and it worked better. The students were more engaged, the students performed better. It was easier for them to link with the students. It was more pleasurable for themselves, they enjoyed it better ... there are many examples of that sort of feedback over the years and sometimes for a staff member, a light does go on, you know. Often it is just a little as I say, drip feed, but if a light does go on, that is definitely helping the performance of the university."

(Academic Development Provider (a))

When staff engage with professional development in the Centre for Teaching and Learning, they should learn to critique their own practice, to improve their course design, to constructively align their module learning outcomes with programme learning outcomes and with assessment. This in turn impacts on student learning and on the performance of the university. Also it is thought that those that engage extensively with the Centre for Teaching and Learning *“are able to go back into their departments and maybe be inspirational for the others”* (Academic Development Provider (b)).

When asked about the indicators of success for the HR training programmes, it was suggested that positive feedback on the evaluation sheets that are given out at the end of a session are an indicator that the session was useful. In relation to the sessions on CV or interview preparation, an indicator of success is when a participant gets the job, or is ranked highly, however this feedback is not officially sought and is not often volunteered. Other indicators of success mentioned include when Heads of Departments that have engaged in the leadership course are engaging successfully with issues that heretofore they would have expected HR to deal with. It was acknowledged that while these indicators of success are not quantified and that correlation can't easily be proved, that they are perceived by the HR unit as successful outcomes of the professional development provision.

An example of how participation in the time-management course, which is organised by HR, enhanced personal performance was given by one interviewee. For this interviewee engagement in the session resulted in a change in her daily practice, bringing better organisation and efficiency to her work.

“[It] gave us very useful ways of thinking about achieving goals on a daily basis ... It just gave us strategies for managing time ... they gave us tips about using bits of software to manage tasks that we have to do ... I found it extremely beneficial and kind of put it into practice every day.”
(Early-career Academic)

The impact of the Library's professional development provision relates to the publication output of individuals that engage with their supports. The anticipated impact of the professional development provision is improved usage of information resources by staff and students. When staff are trained on the use of information resources it is expected that the assignments they give to students will involve intensive use of electronic resources and special collections. The library activity is measured and usage is perceived as an important indicator of success of development initiatives.

“...improved usage of resources, so we would spend let's say two and a half million a year on information resources. I need to be sure that they are being used, if they are not we just cancel them and we do if they are not, and we measure them, the usage, so that is an important indicator. And also I suppose usage of the library by students because a lot of students will be assigned projects, which will require intensive use of increasingly electronic resources, but also of the monograph collections and special collections. So the more we

invest in the development of the academic staff, the more we want to see exploitation of these resources.”

(Academic Development Provider (d))

The ripple impact of this development on the overall performance of the university is perceived as:

“...good grades, is continual traction of high performance second level students, high citation rates on the part of our academic staff, you know, publishing in high impact factor journals. In the case of, particularly Humanities, increased PhD numbers ... increased volume if you like of library research based higher degrees, higher research degrees. Publications are another thing ... not just in journals but again, the research monographs.”

(Academic Development Provider (d))

It was acknowledged that these links between professional development and tangible outputs are not being measured but that measurement of the impact of professional development is possible.

“You could do it by taking ... a lecturer ... and tracking your activity in terms of what CPD have you done, what engagement have you done, where, how much, what kind and then evaluating your outputs, your teaching, your research, your public engagement, your committee work for instance and correlating one with the other ... I mean you know, you assess the inputs and then you measure the outputs and then you evaluate the outputs, you could do it like that if you really wanted to.”

(Academic Development Provider (d))

If the connection between the university goals and the professional development goals were strengthened, it was suggested that professional development of academic staff would help towards the achievement of organisational goals. An important first step would be an exercise to ensure academic staff know what are the priority organisational goals.

“I think it could be done better because ... it’s about recognising the organisational goals and trying to figure out how to get there while satisfying personal career goals, but it is about being clear about what the organisation values.”

(Mid-career Academic)

One early-career academic expressed that the university should put in place more focused professional development to help academics achieve the expressed goals of the university.

“One of the gaps I think would be in terms of how much we are expected now to do, to apply for funding at a very high level and because European funding is sort of you know, it’s one of the massive ways of generating incomes for

universities and creating jobs and creating research projects and centres for excellence and sort of internationalising our research and commercialising our research, I don't think we get enough training or advice and that."
(Early-career Academic)

It was proposed that a broader range of development opportunities should be provided to ensure that academic staff are enabled to professionally evolve and to work more effectively within and outside of their disciplines in pursuit of the university's objectives.

4.5 Conclusion

University A invests in professional development of their academic staff but the structures in place for delivering development opportunities are fragmented and are perceived by many as uncoordinated and suboptimal. While university senior managers acknowledge the limitations of the provision, they make an assumption that professional development of academics is being catered for through the many units that play a role in this area. Professional development providers are working separately to provide development opportunities in areas concerning teaching, research, leadership and administration. They recognise that their offerings are limited by available resources and that the university-wide provision would be enhanced if offerings were better interconnected and cohesively approached. The extent to which academics engage in the professional development provided by the university is determined by the time they have available, their interest in the topic, the perceived benefit to their career, and their awareness of what is on offer. In their strategic plan and in other official documentation University A has clearly set out their performance indicators for teaching and learning, for research and for engagement, for internationalisation and income generation. The objectives of the professional development provision do not particularly align with the university articulated goals, however it is generally acknowledged that university goals, department goals and individual goals should naturally dovetail.

The next chapter presents the case study of University B and then chapter 6 will discuss the findings of both case studies in relation to the four research objectives.

CHAPTER 5. CASE STUDY UNIVERSITY B

5.0 Introduction and Background

Nearing its 170th year, University B is now home to more than 17,000 students. Its total staff base is in the region of 2,400, with just over 1,000 of these being in the academic category. Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are offered in a wide range of discipline areas including Arts, Social Sciences, Celtic Studies, Business, Public Policy, Law, Science, Engineering, Informatics, Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences. The specialist areas for the university are in the areas of Biomedical Science and Engineering, Informatics, Physical and Computational Science, Environment, Marine and Energy, Applied Social Sciences and Public Policy, and Humanities in Context. With three outreach campuses in Irish speaking districts, University B has a special interest in the Irish language, having ten per cent of their students either studying Irish or through the medium of Irish. The university was ranked fourth in Ireland according to THE World University Rankings 2013, and is currently ranked at 284 in the QS World University Rankings. There are three pillars to the organisational structure of the university, the Governing Body, the Academic Council and the University Management Team (UMT). The UMT comprises seven members: the President, Registrar, Vice President for Innovation and Performance, Vice President for Capital Projects, Chief Financial Officer, Director of Operations and the University Secretary. University B has recently undergone a major restructuring exercise of their academic units. Five Colleges and sixteen schools now replace the previous fifty-five departments structure.

The university is coming to the end of its current strategic planning cycle. The current plan acknowledges the radically changed environment in which the university now operates and reveals ambitious plans to succeed in this setting. It intends to take full advantage of the available government funding to increase research capacity. It is focused on increasing the output of masters and PhD students and is placing more emphasis on technology transfer and commercialisation than heretofore. The university is acutely conscious of the competitive environment of higher education and places a lot of emphasis on performance and performance assessment methodologies. The strategic plan commits to the development of a performance-orientated culture based on transparent metrics.

This case study will take the same format as the previous, examining the model that University B has in place to deliver formal offerings of professional development for academic staff. It will look at professional development from three levels of the university, starting from the organisational level it will look at the structural, management and financial aspects of the provision. It will then look at the processes used by the providers to deliver the professional development sessions. The individual academic perspective, as consumers of the service, will then be outlined. The chapter ends with a section examining the link between professional development and university performance.

5.1 Organisation level

In an effort to establish the model that is in place to provide for the professional development needs of academic staff in University B, interview questions focused on the organisational structures, the locus of responsibility and the financial investment in this area.

5.1.1 Structures to support professional development provision

There are three primary providers of professional development for academic staff in University B. These are the Centre for Teaching and Learning, HR, and the Library. Individual academic units put in place their own staff development strategies and it was suggested that this “*can take a myriad of forms*” (UMT Member (a)). A summary of the range of units providing formal professional development offerings and their respective reporting lines is illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2. Model of Professional Development Provision: University B

Reporting to	Registrar	Director of HR	Executive Director Operations	Head of College
Provider	Centre for Teaching & Learning	Human Resources	Library	Head of School
Professional Development Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate Qualifications in Academic Practice • Standalone modules (credit-bearing) • One-off sessions on relevant topics • Annual Conference • Individual & Group Consultation • Using Technology for Teaching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation & Induction • Policies and Procedures • Supporting Students • Research Training • Management and Leadership • Professional Skills • IT Training • Health & Safety • Language Classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing Information • Academic Writing • EndNote • Finding Literature • Reviewing Literature • Individual Consultation on Research Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Seminars

A review of the university’s strategic plan reveals that “Organisation and Staff” is among the seven strategic priority themes. The plan states that the university supports and encourages staff “to equip themselves with the skills, knowledge and confidence to work...to deliver the University’s mission and to realise their own potential”. The post of Vice President for Innovation and Performance in University B was established in 2010 with the objective of increasing staff productivity and establishing a culture of excellence. It was indicated during the interviews that influencing the HR agenda for academic staff development lies within the remit of this role. The university is currently very focused on leadership and management development for academics who have been appointed as Heads of School and on performance management training.

Several interviewees suggested that, to date, sufficient importance has not been given to staff development by university management. It was acknowledged by a member of the University Management Team that staff development in that sense is down the line of priorities and that little or no thought has been given to staff development as a coherent exercise.

“Professional development of academic staff is a very under-developed idea in [University B] ... We don’t really have a policy around staff development... there is no integrated concept of staff development”

(UMT Member (a))

It emerged that the addition of a staff development function to the remit of HR is a relatively recent feature.

“Historically staff development has hardly featured at all on the HR agenda...staff development has essentially been very marginal in this institution up until three or four years ago”

(UMT Member (a))

It was suggested that *“the thought process hasn’t gone deep enough”* regarding the structures for provision of professional development and that the range of providers are *“distributed all over the place and they are not seen as connected to each other at all”* (UMT Member (a)). It was suggested that each of the professional development providers work fairly independently. As each caters for *“very discrete areas”* and there is no overlap or duplication of effort among the providers. Each unit manages their own budget, and each make independent decisions on what development opportunities to offer. This independent way of operating was cited as *“one of the key big problems”* (Academic Development Provider (c)). This notion of problematic fragmentation was highlighted by others also.

“We’ve a very ad hoc approach to them and there’s no match at any level.”

(Academic Development Provider (d))

“I am not even sure how well joined up we are. We are kind of aware of each other’s offerings and we are kind of offering different things ... it is a bit haphazard when it comes to academic staff to be honest”

(Academic Development Provider (e))

The absence of an overarching framework to coordinate the professional development of academic staff was attributed to the historic silo structures or *“federations of interests”* where each department or unit is focused on their own agenda. A problematic area within the provision was cited as the absence of development opportunities related to research.

“I think there are different units for how different things work but the thing that’s missing is research.”

(Mid-career Academic (a))

“There’s not a lot on the research side. There would be ad hoc seminars from time to time which are organised by individual academics really so you know if an academic is filleting in from somewhere else to be an external examiner or a meeting sometimes, someone would give a seminar.”

(Mid-career Academic (b))

The university is introducing a new Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) system and this initiative was referred to by most interviewees. The PMDS is seen by the university as the framework that will underpin the future of staff development and training opportunities. One of the academic development units was particularly optimistic about the opportunity that the new PMDS will present. It was suggested that feedback from the PMDS will inform the professional development offerings and will be the main driver of professional development in the future. The PMDS will complement the workload model, which was rolled out in recent years. Both instruments will be used to benchmark the performance of academics in all domains of their role and the ultimate goal will be to enhance performance.

“As part of that strategic planning ...the whole workload model which we have developed for every school ...indicates what an individual must be achieving in order that the unit must be achieving which feeds back into the overall broader strategic plan. Then what we are saying is that academics only do three things. They research, they contribute and they teach. What we are saying is we want to, over a number of years, build serious performance pieces into that ... and that will have implications for individuals.”

(Academic Development Provider (b))

When asked what the implications would be, it was suggested that while some academics would thrive in the new environment, others will have *“left it too late to get into the race”*. For early and mid-career academics, it is intended that this system will highlight the supports that are required for professional development.

5.1.2 Locus of responsibility

In University B, interviewees generally felt that HR has primary responsibility for all staff development. They provide staff development related to university policies and procedures, leadership and management, and attempt to coordinate the development opportunities of most of the university support services. HR collates all formal offerings of professional development of these units into an ebook which is published on their website. The ebook introduction suggests that staff will be able to access training via their PMDS review and that training will be based on individual needs with the objective of supporting staff in their roles and in helping them to contribute to Unit/School/College strategic plans and learning objectives. The ebook includes a section for registering for each of the training courses, however having checked on three separate occasions, in thirteen of the seventeen categories it indicated ‘no courses found’.

Development related to teaching and learning is devolved to the Centre for Teaching and Learning that operates independently of HR, under the direction of the Registrar (who is the chief academic officer). There was a suggestion that the locus of overall responsibility for professional development of academic staff is under the broad domain of the Registrar, but that the Registrar does not play an active role in setting or monitoring professional development objectives. The Centre for Teaching and Learning reports to the Registrar and they primarily assume responsibility for provision of professional development in matters concerning teaching and learning. The Vice President for Research also reports to the Registrar, and some interviewees suggested that the Vice President for Research should be the person with responsibility for development of research related skills.

In the current organisational structure the university management team comprises a Vice President for Research but there is no equivalent representation for Teaching and Learning. The Registrar and the Deans represent teaching and learning issues but it is not their dedicated role. In practice, the Centre for Teaching and Learning is asked to write the teaching and learning policy and strategy documents, out of which related staff development requirements emanate, but there is no representative from the Centre on the university management team.

For instance the Centre for Teaching and Learning drafted the Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy, which has implications for staff development. However, the five Colleges of the university have “*an incredible amount of autonomy and power*” and it was suggested that they can decide themselves whether or not they want to go in the direction as recommended in the strategy. The absence of a role on the university management team, which is dedicated to issues of teaching and learning, could result in an imbalance of representation and prioritisation for such matters. The high dependency on the Registrar and the Deans to represent teaching and learning issues was identified as an inherent risk in the current structures.

When asked who is accountable to ensure that there is a return on the investment in staff development, it emerged that little thought had been given to such questions previously in the university.

“Until you spoke to me this morning about it, I hadn’t given this any thought at all to be honest about it ... I do see the value in having a person or persons who have overall overarching responsibility and a concept of staff development...no such person exists in this institution.”

(UMT Member (a))

There is no one individual with accountability to ensure coherence and impact in the university’s provision of staff development, but it is generally assumed that academic staff are engaging in the opportunities that are being made available. The notion of having one person with designated responsibility to coordinate all the professional development offerings and to ensure coherence was supported by a number of interviewees.

“If there was some kind of overarching figure ... in the one area so that we lined up correctly ... it is almost taken or assumed that there is a basis of professional development happening ... if there was some entity to pull this together better as opposed to us all tending to do our own bits of the jigsaw.”

(Academic Development Provider (e))

One member of the university management team argued that there would be merit in having “*an exceptionally talented person within HR*” who has a broad understanding of the issues concerning higher education nationally and locally taking institutional responsibility for coordinating staff development provision. Such an individual would be expected to closely liaise with the Centre for Teaching and Learning, with the library and with the Heads of Schools. However, not everyone agreed that HR should coordinate all development opportunities and that there is merit in the current structure of three separate providers working within their own area of expertise.

“At the end of the day like I mean a teaching and learning centre is an expert in teaching and learning, so I mean telling the likes of [HR] to get involved in that would be, you know, you might have an opinion on it but you would have no pedagogy to go behind it ... what we do is probably more on the people end of it which is what we are meant to be at; and then if you look at the library it’s probably playing into the research end of it really, in terms of how they actually monitor it and how they actually can encourage people to do it.”

(Academic Development Provider (b))

If one person were tasked to be accountable for the impact of all the professional development provided for academics, it was argued that such an approach may lead to inequitable distribution of resources, where “*whoever shouts the loudest*” will get the most.

“If you look there is money all over the place happening with this ... in some ways the fact that people are independent probably is more healthy until you can put it together in some kind of a way that would be fair.”

(Academic Development Provider (c))

It was suggested that part of the remit of the Head of School should be to take responsibility to ensure academic staff are getting ample opportunities to engage in professional development. In this proposed model the Head of School takes overarching responsibility, but it is a committee reporting to the Head that agrees the priority development areas. Relevant professional development is put in place to enable academics to perform to expectations and the resulting performance is evaluated annually through the PMDS. In this model, HR would be supporting the provision of professional development as primary providers of professional development related to efficient management systems, and interpersonal skills etc.; the Centre for Teaching and Learning would cater for teaching and learning development needs, and the Head of School would drive the research development.

5.1.3 Finance

It was difficult to get any clarity on the extent to which University B invests in professional development. The three main providers were asked about their own spend on professional development provision but none of the respondents gave specifics in this regard. They were all asked about the overall university investment in professional development, but their responses would indicate that such questions have not been asked in any formal way before, and that no exercise has been carried out to establish how much professional development of academic staff is costing the university.

"I don't have a comparative figure ...so it is hard to say"
(UMT Member (a))

When pressed to indicate what would be a reasonable allocation for staff development as a percentage of the overall budget, one respondent suggested around five per cent of the total university budget, and another suggested a minimum of five per cent of the total payroll budget. It was estimated by one individual that the university is likely to be investing about this amount, when all the provision is taken into account.

When it comes to allocating budgets to the individual units delivering professional development for academic staff, it was suggested that the allocations are determined by *"history"* and *"history renegotiated"* where *"next year's budget is always a function of last year's budget, plus or minus, but very little by way of real prioritisations"* (UMT Member (a)). Each unit needs to put forward a case to the Chief Financial Officer for their annual budget, but the starting point is always the previous year's budget. Typically the amount allocated would be close to the amount spent in the previous year and more recently, due to tighter financial constraints, the budget was being cut by around five per cent annually.

There were indications that the Centre for Teaching and Learning is under-resourced, particularly in relation to staffing. The absence of an adequate number of appropriately experienced and qualified staff to deliver the teaching and learning development programmes was cited as a particular challenge. The lack of sufficient staff means that the Centre cannot scale up to deal with demand for their programmes. The non-pay budget was deemed as small, but satisfactory. The Centre prioritises the budget for activities that directly benefit the students and the academic staff at the front line. The non-pay budget is focused on the core business of delivering the professional development programme, and money is not spent on production of glossy brochures or other auxiliary items. For the library it was difficult to estimate their investment in professional development of academic staff. It was suggested that up to seven staff are involved in delivering training sessions, but that this is just one aspect of their roles so it would be difficult to estimate the investment in terms of library staff time.

An email request was sent to the finance office asking for a breakdown of expenditure on staff development and training in the relevant categories. The Chief Financial Officer responded indicating that the request had been forwarded to the Director of Human

Resources for reply. Unfortunately at the time of final write up of this thesis no response had been received from the Director of HR regarding this request.

5.2 Process Level

The previous section established that the organisational structure in place for professional development provision involves three main providers, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, HR, and the Library. This section will outline the focus of the provision in each of the three units and will clarify the processes used by each to set and deliver their professional development agendas.

5.2.1 Selection and delivery of professional development sessions

The programme of development opportunities offered by the Centre for Teaching and Learning is planned by the Centre's Director in consultation with the Registrar. In general the Centre has quite a free reign to do what they deem appropriate. A range of accredited programmes are offered, as well as shorter credit bearing courses. Regular one-off sessions are delivered on a range of topics and an annual conference is organised. The curriculum for the formal Academic Practice programmes is in line with that of similar programmes in other institutions. By way of modelling good practice, and to encourage creativity, the curriculum is refreshed regularly through inclusion of new and experimental topics that aren't normally in the mainstream.

"So if we have come across somebody who is doing something really different, really interesting, yes we would bring them in to do something because we want to make people aware that there is more scope than you think for creativity and innovation. Some things might not work here but it might make people think of something else."

(Academic Development Provider (a))

The range of development opportunities are not seen as an end in themselves, but as a means of changing a culture, so the institutional culture is one that supports teaching, learning, and curricular innovation and where there is a ritual linkage between research and teaching.

"In a sense we are using those qualifications and professional development frameworks for a bigger agenda and a bigger agenda is cultural change, rather than, in a sense, our aim being to get as many people accredited as possible."

(Academic Development Provider (a))

The Centre for Teaching and Learning runs several courses leading to a qualification in Academic Practice, from Certificate, Diploma, Masters and Doctoral level programmes. The choice of Academic Practice as opposed to Teaching and Learning is symbolic of their effort to take a holistic approach to the professional development of academics, taking into account all the domains of their work. In the understanding that it may be difficult for academics to commit the time to take on the full accredited programme, the

Centre for Teaching and Learning offers a flexible system whereby academics can take single modules on a standalone basis, and using a credit accumulation system they can work towards attaining the full qualification. It was intended that this framework would allow academics who engaged in professional development sessions of other providers in University B, for instance in the management training programmes provided by HR, to get credit towards the qualification in Academic Practice. However, HR did not engage with this idea.

As well as the accredited programmes, one-off sessions, including workshops, seminars, roundtable discussions etc. on relevant topics are regularly organised. When it comes to selecting the thematic areas for the one-off professional development sessions, the Centre is influenced by the current issues being faced by academic staff in University B. These are often identified through keeping an ear to the ground on the teaching and learning issues that academics are facing. It was suggested that such a sensitive approach to the design of professional development sessions has resulted in real change.

“A lot of what I do is having coffee with people and chatting ... going to meetings all the time in different parts of the university, but the reason I do that is to try and see where there are opportunities and an angle I can take to persuade people to change. So I can see a particular group and staff attitude developing ... so I can then provide a course or workshop or programme ... and that can lead to very significant change.”

(Academic Development Provider (a))

A highlight of the Centre's calendar of events is their annual conference, which is primarily targeted at internal academics, but also attracts participation from many other higher education institutions. The annual conference is used as a change catalyst. The theme of the Centre's annual conference is often chosen to address university-wide issues or to line up with other developments that are about to happen in the university. The conference sets the scene for such developments to evolve by engaging external experts in the relevant areas. By and large, staff within the Centre for Teaching and Learning deliver the range of professional development programmes on offer, and visiting speakers are also regularly engaged. Due to the geographical remoteness of the university, the Centre considers the use of external academics an important element of the process. Video conferencing is used to good effect to facilitate the external input, and when visiting speakers are physically on campus, networking opportunities are organised to allow staff to meet and chat with them. While the formal accredited programmes are pre-planned, the visiting speakers, one-off sessions and workshops are organised on a more *ad-hoc* basis. This is partly due to the fact that staff of the Centre are so busy that it is difficult to pre-plan everything, and partly because they are dependent on the availability of appropriate visiting speakers.

The HR department has a staff development and training unit. What this unit delivers is largely influenced by the Vice President for Innovation and Performance. Cognisant of the changed environment in which higher education now operates, and of the remit of this role to get greater productivity from all staff, the Vice President is focused on

developing the new Heads of School that were appointed following the university restructuring exercise. The challenge of getting Heads of School to “*operate the schools from the university’s point of view*” was identified. A perceived challenge is posed for the university in that the academics

“tend to see the world from the point of view of the individuals involved ... they operate more or less as if it is a private institution ...they have no concept of what the university’s requirements are...in the context of a higher education system which has been publicly funded”.

(UMT Member (a))

Due to the extent of this challenge, in recent years HR has prioritised the development needs of Heads of Schools, focusing on the area of leadership. The leadership development programme is operated using mentoring and coaching programmes. The objective is primarily to equip Heads of School with the skills to do the job that they have already been appointed into, in other words to address the skills deficits that have been identified. The approach then is one of remediation.

For the HR representatives, it is very important that the purpose of the training is supported by the most senior levels of management. This is especially the case if the purpose of the training is to change practice. The HR representatives are satisfied that the focus of their professional development programme is addressing a university need. One interviewee expressed that academics “*have a tendency to over manage and probably under lead*”, and that the university would need to take a serious approach to development of leadership skills for senior academics (Academic Development Provider (c)). Together with the leadership and coaching programmes, a range of one-off training sessions are organised. It was acknowledged that the training interventions are used to facilitate academic managers to solve their work related problems and to prevent industrial relations issues from arising. The result is improved performance where “*you have brought them along with solving the problem and their work is better*” (Academic Development Provider (c)). When academics have these positive experiences that enhance their work, it was suggested that they are likely to re-engage with HR for further development opportunities.

It was notable that both HR representatives that were interviewed had a tendency to speak in the future tense about their processes, indicating that they are currently going through a major change with regard to their staff development and training unit. The future focus was particularly evident in relation to the PMDS, which is currently being rolled out. The PMDS has been introduced to develop more rigorous transparent standard procedures and processes with regards to staff and operations and also to enable performance management. The HR representatives suggested that academics perceive them in different ways, with some seeing them as a “*policing body*”. This notion was supported in interviews with academic staff. The perception among some interviewees is that HR is more focused on compliance and meeting the university policy objectives than on holistic staff development.

“They tend to run maybe things that stand alone. So they have a very non-academic focus on it ... it’s just they don’t think in that way. I suspect they see they have a big list of staff who have to get certain training and they want to try and push training options, but it isn’t necessarily the case that they are looking at the holistic development of an academic.”

(Academic Development Provider (a))

Many of the professional development initiatives coordinated by HR are outsourced, and delivered by consultants. This tendency makes some academic staff cynical about its purpose and dubious about its relevance or appropriateness in the higher education context. The HR representatives were well aware of the difficulty discerning academics have with external consultants delivering, what they feel is inadequate training.

“They are not interested, they will say to you ‘well tell me the name of a good book about leadership or about management’ and whatever.”

(Academic Development Provider (b))

The HR department was mindful of the importance of getting good trainers, and of managing their relationship with those that are contracted to deliver what may be perceived as “*bad news*”.

“Ultimately you can do it internally but then sometimes if you are going to be telling bad news sometimes that isn’t going to actually work. If you are going to hire in consultants it is very important that they very much feel part of your organisation ... the trainer is very, very important.”

(Academic Development Provider (b))

Research support is a strong priority for the library, and the provision of professional development falls within that broader goal. Ultimately the library wants to achieve greater use of the information services, including archives and special collections.

“But we are coming at it from a different angle rather than saying the professional development of academic staff is a priority, it is more supporting academics in the conduct of research, making the best use of archives and other information would be our priority.”

(Academic Development Provider (e))

The professional development sessions offered by the Library largely concern information skills. At the most basic level, the library provides guidance on where to find information, and then how to manage it using software like Endnote. Guidance is offered on a one-to-one level on all aspects of research and specific development sessions are offered on a range of topics related to publishing, including the impact factor of journals, bibliometrics, and open access publishing.

5.2.2 Communication

The Centre for Teaching and Learning uses a range of methods to communicate their professional development offerings to staff. An internal blog is maintained and Blackboard is used but email has been found to be the most effective communication method. On the Centre's website, a timetable of professional development opportunities is kept and these are also included on the university weekly events calendar which is issued each Thursday. When visiting speakers are coming, even greater publicity is organised to ensure that people have ample notice of the event in question.

The HR department also uses email to communicate their professional development programme offerings. Targeted group emails are used when the specific session is aimed at a designated group, for instance Heads of School. There was a suggestion that individual emails are sometimes sent if it is thought that a specific individual would benefit from attending. The HR website has a Learning and Development ebook, which is a guide to the training and development offerings available to staff in preparation for their PMDS review. On three separate occasions over the course of some months the links to courses were checked and each time the majority of the links indicated that no courses were available.

The library uses the events section of their website to communicate the training programmes they make available. Additionally a monthly e-newsletter is emailed to academics outlining details of the upcoming training sessions.

Some academics are not aware of the range of communication modes being used by the individual providers. By and large interviewees indicated that they find out what professional development sessions are on via the email communication.

5.2.3 Record keeping

Interviewees perceived that the university is not keeping any systematic record of their attendance at professional development or training sessions. It was suggested that while it would be useful if the university could provide a complete record of their participation in relevant events, academics would be somewhat uncomfortable at the thought of the university keeping such a record, and how it might be used.

"I think that if they did it in some sort of official way that it could have a negative effect that people think that they're being watched ... we're all quite paranoid."

(Mid-career Academic (a))

"I feel that that kind of thing can be used as a tool for very crudely quantifying people's levels of engagement or productivity or effort."

(Mid-career Academic (b))

The Centre for Teaching and Learning acknowledged that they are somewhat informal when it comes to record keeping. However, in recent years, the university operational

plan specifies targets around the number and mix of people on development programmes and for this reason the Centre is keeping tabs on the numbers of people that engage with their professional development offerings. Staff of the Centre are very involved in the delivery of the professional development programmes, and it was suggested that they can readily identify patterns or trends in engagement and so they feel that there is no need to carry out a formal analysis of attendance records. Through their direct involvement in the programme delivery, the Centre's staff know what topics are popular, and what issues are arising for staff that can be addressed through professional development sessions.

The HR unit uses sign-in sheets to record attendance at their professional development events but don't use these to analyse patterns of engagement. The HR department was asked if they hold a record of whether or not relevant academic staff are engaging in sufficient professional development to maintain their professional accreditation - for instance, if their medical doctors are maintaining their registration with the Irish Medical Council, and their lawyers with the Bar Council etc. It was acknowledged that such information is not sought and no such record is kept.

The library maintains a record of registration of attendance for their professional development sessions. Participants are asked to register in advance for each session using a system called Event Bright. This system keeps a record of the details of who registered for what. The system allows the library to easily collate the engagement of individual academics with library sessions, and it was suggested that it would be perfectly possible to give an academic, on request, their registration record.

5.2.4 Evaluation

Evaluating the impact of professional development did not appear as a priority for any of the providers. For the Centre for Teaching and Learning, it was suggested that it is difficult to evaluate the impact of their work with academics in a scientific way, given that their objective is focused on changing the culture and attitudes towards teaching. They know they are successful when they see rising demand for their programmes. The ripple effect, whereby more academics come from Schools where previous participants from that School have spread the word, is considered as indicative of positive staff experiences with the Centre.

The HR representatives interviewed suggested that "*repeat custom*" is the best indicator of successful training. If academics have had a good experience with a HR professional development programme, they will be more inclined to engage in future programmes. The primary form of evaluation of one-off sessions used by HR is what they call the "*happy sheet*". For the longer term development programmes tailored online surveys are usually used for evaluation purposes. It was suggested that the feedback provided through the evaluations is used to inform new modes of delivery and new thematic areas for professional development.

5.3 Individual level

Individual academics were asked about their experience as users of the professional development provided by University B. The questions were intended to find out what development opportunities academics engage with and how and why they engage.

5.3.1 *What constitutes professional development*

It was evident from comments of interviewees that the term ‘professional development’ is not widely used in University B and that there is no common understanding of what it means.

“It’s not a phrase that I would use or hear a lot in the context of my own job or academic work.”

(Mid-career Academic (b))

During the interviews, many interviewees asked for elaboration on what the term meant, or encompassed. Some acknowledged that they did not immediately associate all the dimensions of development with the term, and only through our conversation, when they were asked about the range of provision of professional development available in the university did they start to think about the broader development opportunities being offered.

“I’ve done quite a lot of the stuff that’s offered through [the Centre for Teaching and Learning] and to be honest I like doing it; I wouldn’t even think of it in terms of professional development and that language isn’t widely used amongst the people that I work with”

(Mid-career Academic (a))

One interviewee suggested that attending sessions in the Centre for Teaching and Learning might be a stretch of the concept of professional development. Another thought that training in the use of new software packages would not really constitute professional development.

“I don’t know whether you would call going to a seminar in [the Centre for Teaching and Learning] professional development?”

(Mid-career Academic (a))

“The level of training we would provide would be for example on maybe some of the administrative applications ... that’s probably stretching professional development.”

(Academic Development Provider (d))

While the sessions provided by the library and the Centre for Teaching and Learning did not immediately come to mind as professional development initiatives for many interviewees, further probing revealed that these opportunities are indeed considered as contributing to the professional development of academics.

“I was thinking of staff development in a narrow sense of that term, which would involve...leadership or working with other people or all of these other sort of classic supposedly HR territory ... I hadn’t thought about what [the centre for teaching and learning were doing] as staff development, but now that you have brought it up to me, that absolutely of course is what it is...except we don’t think about it in that way at all.”

(UMT Member (a))

Academics spoke about going along to sessions organised by the Centre for Teaching and Learning. At these sessions they share interesting discussions with peers who have similar interests and who are experiencing the same frustrations. They don’t refer to this engagement with the Centre as professional development *per se*, but openly acknowledge that participation in these sessions help to improve their performance.

“A lot of it is discussions with people who are interested in this and I suppose it’s actually academic work itself as well as helping us to develop our role. So, I’d have an interest in discussing higher education teaching and learning from an academic point of view anyway as well as from a practice point of view and I think a lot of those people who engage in those sessions would be similar. As well as wanting to improve their performance in teaching, they’re also just interested in the whole mission ... having interesting discussions with people who have similar frustrations and similar interests.”

(Mid-career Academic (a))

It emerged that many academics held a preference for these types of professional development sessions that are not so-labelled. Some academics held the attitude that they were beyond the formal professional development sessions. Nonetheless they acknowledged that their professional performance benefited from the sessions that bring people together to talk about their experience.

“Professional development for academics has limited value is what I’m saying...I think the most positive experiences I’ve had have been on the learning and teaching side where people are coming and talking about their experiences of learning and teaching, sometimes in domains quite different from my own you know, I find something like that is really useful.”

(Mid-career Academic (b))

This individual felt that it is impossible for the university to provide effective professional development for him, as his concept of professional development is that which advances the discipline and he is the only person in University B with expertise in this strand of the discipline.

Conversations revealed that for many academics professional development is ubiquitous. It is defined as the tacit learning that happens from the everyday experience of doing their work.

“Development happens all the time. I feel I am developing when I’m doing my core work, when I’m involved in research, when I’m actually doing a piece of research myself or when I’m working with a graduate student productively or when I’m teaching and I get better at what I’m doing. When I go to conferences, when I meet other academics, I’m learning a bit, I’m learning something all the time and I’m developing like that. I feel that’s how development happens.”
(Mid-career Academic (b))

“I would look at professional development in terms of research and how you conduct research okay and mentoring of that, which really was self-taught and interacting. Again, interacting with lots of your fellow researchers, that’s how you develop I think.”
(Head of School)

The experience of supervising was also cited as a good opportunity for learning. The Supervisors handbook which the university makes available was mentioned as a professional development offering. Student feedback was mentioned by another interviewee, in the context of professional development that served to improve his teaching performance. The quality review process, which includes a quality improvement exercise was cited as being closely allied to professional development.

One interviewee made a differentiation between development that is focused on being “a professional academic” and that which is concerned with developing or advancing the academic discipline. The perception was that academics prioritise professional development that is concerned with advancing their discipline over training that is focused on professionalising the way in which they work.

“There is a difference between training and academic pursuit...I think that’s the problem you know there isn’t a huge understanding or ... commitment to training and development as a professional academic as opposed to training and developing your academic profession. So [an academic’s] measure would be how many areas of development are there in their particular area of expertise and their research as opposed to maybe their particular competencies as a professional academic to deliver courses or you know to manage a school or research centre or whatever.”
(Academic Development Provider (d))

Several interviewees indicated that the most effective ways in which the university can provide professional development opportunities is to facilitate academics to develop themselves through provision of funding to travel to conferences, and providing the necessary time for development through sabbatical leave.

5.3.2 Engagement with development opportunities

Several of the interviewees observed the high level of voluntarism attached to engagement with professional development initiatives, with some seeing it as a positive factor and others seeing it as a negative. The university has recently introduced a coaching programme, focused on improving the performance of Heads of School, but there is no obligation for Heads to engage in the programme, and some are resistant to engage. That academics can opt not to engage in programmes that are designed and targeted especially for them generates a sense of futility with regard to the university efforts at professional development.

“Even if you could provide what you would regard as the perfect development system, you are still stuck with the very peculiar demand or absence of demand side to it...they can simply decide, I don’t think I should do this...the full blunt of academic cynicism can be used to undermine the process.”

(UMT member (a))

From the perspective of one of the academic development providers the voluntary nature of engagement is preferable.

“It changes completely the tenor of it if people are here because they have to be and not because they want to be ... the dilemma is compulsion has often the opposite effect ... you would get much more likelihood that the culture would become resentful”

(Academic Development Provider (d))

It was suggested that there are no clear patterns or trends in terms of academic staff engagement with the professional development programme offered by the Centre for Teaching and Learning. There is a spread of engagement across all discipline areas. It was suggested that there is no shortage of demand for the professional programmes offered by the Centre, with the module on Research Supervision attracting particularly high demand. The growth in demand was attributed to the increase in expectation by the university that new staff engage in the programme. Professors and academics that have been in post for many years also continue to engage in the Academic Practice programmes and this participation mix of new and established staff was identified as another key strength of the programme.

HR reported a similar pattern of growth in engagement in the past five years and that in general professional development is now approached by academics with a more open and positive attitude. It was indicated that there is an increasing tendency for academics to have higher expectations regarding what HR can do for them and for academics to approach HR to seek specific training. A gender pattern has been identified by the HR unit, in that males tend to engage more in development opportunities and it was suggested that the male staff in University B are more ambitious than the females.

It was suggested that the engagement of academics with the professional development service of the Library is “*patchy*”. One exception to this is engagement with the sessions

on management of references using Endnote, which is an on-going growth area. A pattern has been observed that it is the younger, more ambitious academics that tend to engage with the development opportunities provided. The longer serving academics, if they engage at all, have a preference for one-to-one sessions rather than open sessions.

Individual academics go through a thought process in deciding whether or not to engage with a particular professional development session. They consider the relevance of the topic, the background and reputation of the instructor, the duration of the session, the mode of delivery, and the potential benefits of attending. The following response represents the decision making process of many academics:

“If it was going to be something of interest and useful to me, help me to get my job ... if it’s a three-hour session and what are you getting out of those three hours. Is it really three hours or is it something I can figure out in half an hour by going on line and reading the manual ... I try to make an assessment of whether it’s sufficient or whether it’s worthwhile that way. But the person delivering the thing obviously matters, the reputation of the person delivering it and what their background is.”

(Mid-career Academic (b))

Individual academics were asked about their engagement with the development opportunities provided by the university. It emerged that academics can have very different experience of professional development and expectations of the university in this regard. The response of one mid-career academic illustrated a perception that university staff development efforts are of limited interest or benefit.

“I’ve been to things like on the admin side, ordering and purchasing. There might have been one or two other things like that. There is an office which is called the staff training and resources or something like that; it’s more oriented towards admin staff than academic staff. They do some things that are oriented towards researchers I suppose or maybe young academic staff - writing papers and applying for grants, that sort of thing. I haven’t taken part in any of those...I feel, rightly or wrongly, or arrogantly maybe, I feel that I’m gone beyond that.”

(Mid-career Academic (b))

This interviewee did not have expectations of the university to provide professional development opportunities for him, as he felt that this is his own responsibility as an academic. Interviews revealed that academics tend to engage with professional development events that appeal to their specific areas of interest, and if their experience is positive, they become “repeat customers”.

“What I would mostly have engaged with in professional development was to do with teaching and learning ...I pursued their courses and started with their certificate programme and I enjoyed it and I moved on to the next stage of it and so on.”

(Mid-career Academic (a))

One late-career academic indicated that he had not received any formal development opportunities in aspects of teaching or research.

“I never had any formal training in how to develop my teaching techniques as such ... I have never had any formal training or professional development when it comes to research or research techniques.”

(Head of School)

A number of barriers to engagement with professional development were identified during the interviews. Some academics will not engage in open development sessions for fear of exposing professional weakness and for this reason, many opt to avail of one-to-one support.

“They are happier to come to the research support librarian’s office and engage with these things on a one-to-one than to be seen in a crowd.....strangely enough, it is the ones that are more confident that don’t mind being seen in a crowd, but the ones less so, yeah.....they are a bit reticent about being seen”

(Academic Development Provider (e))

The types of professional development sessions that work so successfully for the Centre for Teaching and Learning, where peers learn from discussing their frustrations and challenges, simply won’t work for research as there is an engrained culture of resistance to discuss professional development needs in research.

“You can go to a teaching and learning conference and talk about what you tried to do in your class, how it worked and you can get an idea from somebody else’s talk and it’s nice ... [with regard to research] I’ve never heard anybody saying ‘oh, I had an idea, or this problem won’t work out or I had a paper published.’ It’s like private business.”

(Mid-career Academic (a))

Heads of School receive no extra remuneration for their four year tenure in the role and they are expected to take on a substantial increase in workload. It was acknowledged that this can lead to an absence of motivation to engage with the targeted development sessions organised by HR. No incentive is given to them to engage and the heavier workload means that time is a big issue for them. For all academics time emerged as the biggest barrier to engaging with professional development.

“Time in general I think is under constant pressure. There’s always more stuff and it seems to be, there are always new things, there are new initiatives and new things being asked and you know, well time isn’t infinite, it has to come from somewhere so time is a real problem.”

(Mid-career Academic (b))

It emerged that academics are more inclined to take the time to engage with professional development that they perceive as having a tangible link with career progression.

5.3.3 Professional development and career pathways

The absence of career progression opportunities was considered as a major issue by providers when considering staff development provision. The consequence of the current promotion scheme, where the perception is that there is little difference between the group that gets promoted and the group that doesn't, leads to high levels of demotivation in academic staff. The absence of guidance on career pathways is perceived as problematic. It was suggested that some academics do not achieve their potential because they don't know what it is they should be doing to contribute in a significant way to the organisation.

"In a year when there's a promotion scheme going on you feel you're competing against your colleagues instead of working with them and the whole thing is really a mess ... there are no clear criteria for what you need to do in order to be promoted to senior lecturer."

(Mid-career Academic (a))

When asked if there was clarity on what is valued when it comes to promotion opportunities, academics suggested that a range of factors are taken into account, from research output, to enthusiasm, to intellect.

"Publication is the big thing... it's not purely on publication. ...sometimes it's based on performance in the interview and pretty subjective things like enthusiasm and evidence of just pure intellect ...something outside of the normal publication and teaching activities, things like working with communities or outreach things ... evidence of initiative."

(Mid-career Academic (b))

One interviewee, who was unsuccessful in her application for promotion revealed that the experience left her "upset" and "demoralised". The feedback provided was described as "quite insulting and dismissive". This academic had completed some of the accredited programmes in Academic Practice in advance of applying for promotion, and she prepared a comprehensive teaching portfolio to augment her application. Her perception was that this material was not appropriately considered or recognised in the process.

"When the feedback came back, what it said about my teaching, after all that stuff was, 'she teaches 120 hours a year and assesses in her courses which would be deemed to be acceptable'... After all that stuff about people's thoughts on teaching, people's efforts if all you're going to do is count up the number of lecture hours...and [the number of hours you teach] isn't even at your own discretion it's what is assigned to you by the Head of School. That's what really upset me."

(Mid-career Academic (a))

The HR representatives acknowledged the importance of linking professional development to career planning, while in tandem keeping the university's interest in

focus. It was suggested that the PMDS would be a useful tool for academics in relation to identifying development opportunities necessary for career progression. The PMDS, together with the framework of policies and procedures underpinning it, were referred to as the infrastructure that is being put in place to provide the university with the requisite information to identify talent. Some interviewees perceived the PMDS as a tool that will bring clarity on what academics should be doing to advance their careers within the university and that it will serve as an effective tool for them to benchmark their performance with their peers. Many others suggested that the PMDS would be divisive and that in its current design, which includes quantitative assessment and scoring, it will be strongly resisted by academics.

It was suggested that greater highlighting of the benefit of engaging with professional development for career prospects would make engagement with such opportunities more attractive to busy academics. One academic described his career journey during the interview, and indicated that professional development was a critical factor along the way. However the professional development he spoke about as important for career progression was the self-initiated informal and tacit development opportunities of networking with colleagues and consistent efforts at learning on the job.

It emerged that the autonomous nature of the academic role results in a situation where some academics are thriving and others are floundering, as quite often it not known how successful an academic is with their research or their teaching until it comes to applying for a promotion. It was suggested that success in academic career progression is often dependent on luck.

“With luck you might hook up with somebody, a colleague perhaps who has a little bit more experience and similar interests and get going on something. But that’s partly a matter of chance and partly a matter of luck.”

(Mid-career Academic (a))

Despite being interested and ambitious it is very possible for early-career academics to “*fall into a rut*”. Several interviewees proposed that introduction of a structured mentorship scheme in each School would provide the necessary support mechanism for the less experienced academics, and would serve to “*engineer the luck*”. Academics expressed that the university is taking a risk in not adequately supporting early career academics, as the lack of guidance for some results in under-performance.

5.4 Professional development and university performance

Interviewees were asked what balance a university should have in terms of professional development meeting university goals, and meeting individual participants’ goals. Interviewees strongly felt that the university and individual goals should be aligned. The notion that there should be a clear expectation of a return on the investment in professional development was widely supported.

“If you’re going to spend the money training people on that then you have to try and link it back because how can you justify spending it otherwise.”

(Academic Development Provider (d))

There was a concern that due to the voluntary nature of engagement with the professional development being provided, it is effectively not reaching those that most need to improve their performance.

“They’re preaching to the converted and you’re faced with people who are interested in going to these things that go to them. So if the managerial goals are to sort of raise the performance of the whole establishment, it’s questionable whether people signing up for things like this on a voluntary basis will do that or not.”

(Mid-career Academic (a))

At the highest levels of university management there is an expectation that the professional development being provided to middle management levels will enhance the university’s performance. This will be achieved when the middle management levels are developed to the extent that they understand their role as one that prioritises the university needs above the needs of their individual academic unit.

“My expectation is...the core leadership we have in the academic area, which are five deans and sixteen Heads of School, that they come to see their primary role as helping this university to improve its overall performance and minimise the historic role they have seen themselves as representing their staff to the university.”

(UMT Member (a))

The indicators of success of a professional development programme that contributes to university performance were not readily identifiable by some interviewees as it was suggested that such indicators are not easily measured.

“We are always driven to talk about the things that we can measure ... I think there is a kind of mysterious dimension to all of this which is, some of it comes from gut and instinct that it has worked ... in some ways the success for me would be something to do with the ethos of the place and the quality of that particular ethos.”

(UMT Member (a))

Similarly, the Centre for Teaching and Learning suggested that it is difficult to measure the impact of their professional development programmes, as the overarching objective is a change in culture, which is about attitudes and other subjective things that are not necessarily easily measurable. Interviewees were well aware of the headline university performance goals in relation to rankings, income generation, and research excellence. It was suggested that the following indicators of university performance can, and should be, linked to professional development of academics:

- Research output
- Citation index
- Research income
- PhD supervision
- Student evaluation
- Service to the university (participation in open days etc.)
- Outreach activities

For instance if the university decided to make a strategic investment in professional development provision in the area of academic writing, it would be reasonable that they would expect a higher citation index and a higher research output as a consequence of their investment.

“They should be productive in their publication ... the one the university most wants to see happen...if we can give them the raw materials to do research, that is often the case of archives or help them to find the relevant literature and to manage it, then the obvious next stage is that publication should be easier for them and should be more prolific as well.”

(Academic Development Provider (e))

It was argued that the success of professional development in enhancing university performance should also be linked to less quantifiable metrics including changes in culture and attitude. For instance it was indicated that the impact of the professional development programmes on teaching and learning could be determined using pre and post evaluations of attitudes and practice. This would show what changes have taken place over time as a result of participation in professional development initiatives. Several examples of how staff development enhances university performance were provided. For instance the growth and spread in use of technology in teaching, use of better teaching methods, and reform in curriculum and assessment designs were all cited as improvements that could be traced directly to participants who completed the Certificate in Academic Practice.

Some interviewees expressed that the extent to which the institution will actually benefit from professional development provision is closely related to the extent to which the programmes are tailored to meet the local needs and culture. If the objective of professional development is to change attitudes and culture, then if it is generic and externally provided it is not likely to be attuned to those needs. The importance of professional development providers participating in discussions where the real issues are revealed is paramount to the development of a successful development programme that will have real impact.

When asked about their expectations of the outcome of their professional development programmes, one academic development unit indicated that their goals are closely linked with preventing industrial relations issues but even more concerned with achieving the university goals as set out in the strategic plan.

“You have a certain amount of things that fit in obviously to IR and all that kind of stuff, managing conflict ... through its strategic planning [university B] is very clear what it wants to happen ... a lot of the programmes we have would support that and that is the aim.”

(Academic Development Provider (b))

There was strong consensus that that investment in professional development brings a return to the university but that University B is not sufficiently cognisant of the links. It was proposed that an exercise should be carried out to demonstrate the return on the investment in professional development and that the results of such an exercise would strengthen the potential to get an enhanced budget for same. It was acknowledged that while there is a belief that there is a correlation between professional development and performance improvement, that proving cause and effect is a real challenge.

5.5 Conclusion

University B has articulated ambitious performance goals and is recently very focused on performance assessment and metrics. The approach to professional development is fragmented however with several units taking responsibility for provision of development opportunities. That said much of the provision, and in particular that related to teaching and learning is very well perceived. The importance of professional development in assisting staff to deliver on the university's mission is acknowledged by senior management. The development of Heads of School is being prioritised in the expectation that Heads will in turn manage the development of academic staff in their Schools through the new PMDS system. This PMDS system, which will numerically score the performance of individuals, has not gained the confidence of all staff however and is viewed with suspicion and contempt by many academics. The professional development provision currently available does not closely correlate with career progression or with the university's performance goals and it was suggested that such links should be more tightly connected.

The next chapter will analyse the findings of both case studies and will link the findings with the research objectives to demonstrate their contribution to answering the main research question.

CHAPTER 6. CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

6.0 Introduction

This study set out to answer the research question:

How can the provision of professional development for academic staff be optimised to enhance university performance?

Two case studies have been presented revealing findings that contribute to answering this question. The study began with four objectives and the findings under each objective are now presented and discussed. The findings are discussed in light of the literature, and thus provide further illumination on the primary research question and on the objectives of the study. The chapter begins with an account of the current status of professional development provision in Universities A and B and discusses the historical context that contributed to the status quo. The way in which academics engage with the current provision is then outlined. The potential for professional development provision to contribute to university performance goals in the three domains of teaching, research and engagement are examined. The study proposes that a more conscious approach to the management of professional development provision is desirable. Such an approach will better facilitate the connection between professional development provision and organisational performance. A framework for designing professional development activities is proposed. This framework aligns organisational performance goals and individual professional goals and promotes a performance-led approach to the design of professional development initiatives. It is proposed that the implementation of this approach will require a different organisational structure in each of the two cases studied. Based on the findings of the two case studies a new organisational structure to enhance the management of professional development provision is put forward.

6.1 Organisation and management of academic staff development – current status

The first objective of this study was to develop a better understanding of the range of ways that professional development of academic staff is currently organised and managed in universities in Ireland. The two case studies reveal common findings which are relevant to this objective. In summary, it was found in both universities that while the potential of professional development of academics is highly regarded, it is not managed as a university priority. The approach to delivery of professional development is fragmented involving several separate providers. In both universities the two major players in professional development provision for academic staff are the Centre for Teaching and Learning and the HR Unit. In University A the Centre for Teaching and Learning appears to be the dominant player and in University B, HR is perceived as the main professional development provider. In both universities the Library separately provides a range of professional development opportunities and in University A the Computer Centre also has a distinct training and development unit. While both universities have a research support centre, it was notable that in each case academics perceived that there was no support provided within the university for their development

in the research domain. In each of the universities it was indicated that there is not a cohesive approach to professional development provision and that each of the professional development providers operates autonomously. The different providers are using different approaches to staff development with the Centre for Teaching and Learning primarily seeing academic staff development as a scholarly activity and HR and Information Services departments delivering it as a service.

In both cases it was found that neither university management nor professional development providers were conscious of the total cost of professional development provision to the university. While there is no articulated expectation of a return on the investment made in professional development, in both cases the assumption that professional development will enhance the capability of academics to achieve organisational goals was evident. With the exception of the accredited programmes of the Centres for Teaching and Learning, professional development providers in both institutions operate a largely *ad hoc* approach to selection and scheduling of professional development initiatives, and the perception of provision by academics is that it is somewhat haphazard and that it is not cohesively planned. Professional development sessions are delivered by a diverse range of staff, both internal and external to the university, including academics, administrators, and consultants. In both cases there is evidence of weak record keeping and unsystematic evaluation practices with regard to professional development initiatives. Where evaluation does happen it tends to focus more on participant reaction than on operational impact or performance outcomes. In both universities the provision of opportunities for development related to teaching and learning is perceived very positively but it was strongly suggested that it has limited reach, largely appealing to the teaching enthusiasts. In both universities the HR units are prioritising the provision of leadership and management development opportunities for Heads of School and senior academic managers, and they are less attentive to the development needs of other academic staff. In neither case was there evidence of professional development which is focused on supporting the engagement role of academics. The connection between professional development and career progression is perceived as very loose by academics in both universities.

6.1.1 Context of higher education in Ireland

These findings must be understood in relation to their historical context. In Ireland, up until the late 1980's professional development of staff barely featured on the agenda of universities. From this time various pieces of legislation started to be introduced which impacted on universities. For instance the legislation related to employment, health and safety, data protection, freedom of information, and equality legislation all had implications for staff development. These implications led to the development and growth of the training provision of the university HR departments and the Health and Safety Offices. From the 1990's a specific focus on professional development for academic staff emerged. A number of driving forces encouraged an interest in revitalising the status of teaching as a central aspect of the academic profession. International developments and literature emerged which highlighted the lower status

for teaching in higher education, in comparison to research. There were calls for institutional policies to be developed which would give recognition of, incentives to, and rewards for good teaching, and that promotion policies and procedures would take account of teaching in a systematic way (Irish University Training Network 1998). The Bologna Process, with its emphasis on quality assurance, quality improvement, and a shift in focus from teacher-centred to student-centred methodologies, influenced a greater urgency for support for the academics teaching role. Developments were also influenced by Skilbeck's (2001, p.72) report on higher education in Ireland, which highlighted "new and improved ways of teaching students" as one of the key challenges facing higher education staff. Further impetus grew from a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which called for a more positive approach to staff development and a commitment of institutional resources to staff development programmes "in particular in the development and updating of teaching skills" (OECD 2004, p.27).

All these driving forces led to the increased availability of funding for professional development initiatives from the Higher Education Authority (HEA). To some extent, the organisational structures that grew to cater for the growing development needs of academics can be traced to the HEA funding models which invited applications for grants to support staff development in teaching methodologies and course delivery. The HEA Training of Trainers programme, which began in 1994, awarded funding to individual academics to initiate programmes locally to support their colleagues' professional development in teaching. Further HEA funding became available in 1996 through the Targeted Initiatives scheme leading to a more widespread emergence of bottom-up initiatives being run by individuals and small groups of academics. These bottom-up initiatives were deemed worthwhile, but their piecemeal nature and their bottom-up origins limited their ability to have university-wide impact. From the year 2000, the annual recurrent grant included approximately €1m in respect of the National Development Programme objectives to improve the quality of third-level education through staff training and skills development. Tensions started to emerge between the growing training function of HR departments and academics who felt that it would be inappropriate for HR to deliver professional development in the area of teaching and learning. The HEA were interested in embedding the groundswell of good practice that was emerging and in 2004 they launched the Strategic Initiatives scheme. This funding scheme stipulated that the applications for funding would need to demonstrate that they were linked with the institutional strategic objectives for teaching and thence forced a more senior level of engagement in grant applications. It was this funding initiative that supported the establishment of Centres for Teaching and Learning that would focus on the provision of professional development related to higher education teaching on a university-wide scale. While HR units continued to provide professional development in areas concerning management and administration, and later in leadership, the Centres for Teaching and Learning were staffed by academics and established as entirely separate from HR or any other existing units offering professional development opportunities.

Over time each of the Centres for Teaching and Learning established their own accredited programmes focused on teaching and learning in higher education. Certificate, Diploma, and Master's programmes emerged, and University B even extended their offerings to a PhD programme in Academic Practice. These programmes were influenced by similar developments in the UK and by the work of scholars in the UK and North America. The work of scholars like Ernest Boyer, Lee Shulman, Pat Hutchings, Mary Huber, Howard Gardner, and that of Mick Healey, Ray Land, and Alan Jenkins had a particular influence on academic developers in Ireland, who focused the work of their Centres for Teaching and Learning on the scholarship of teaching and learning, catering for students' multiple intelligences, encouraging teaching for understanding, development of teaching portfolios, and integration of research, teaching and learning (Lyons *et al.* 2002; Hyland 2004; O'Neill *et al.* 2005; Murphy and Higgs 2009; Murphy *et al.* 2010).

The last decade has seen a paradigm shift in the research landscape in Ireland with higher education research and development spending almost quadrupling, bringing it in line with OECD and EU averages (DES 2011). With regard to supporting the research role, it is only in very recent years that universities have established research support centres and the interviews would suggest that the reach of these research supports is still rather limited. The range of units that are delivering professional development opportunities for academic staff continue to grow separately. Some gaps in the provision remain evident, and in particular there is little evidence of support for staff with regard to their role in engagement.

The case studies demonstrate that Universities A and B responded to the changing development needs of academics in an *ad hoc* way, with several support structures growing up separately. An understanding of the way in which these universities have traditionally embarked on strategic planning provides further context to the current fragmented state of affairs. The concept of strategic planning, as it is currently understood, was not formalised in the universities studied until the turn of the century. Higher education in Ireland enjoys a high level of academic autonomy relative to European counterparts (Estermann and Nokkala 2009) and this autonomy can serve simultaneously as a strength and a weakness. As one interviewee put it:

"We keep coming back within the university sector to what is both a strength and a weakness: the individual autonomy of the universities ... Some individuals may be very effective but they're on solo runs and they do their own things, some individuals in teaching and learning centres have their own pet projects or their own pet approaches and they continue on with those without reference to the changing and rapidly developing needs of the institution ... It is the issue that comes up again and again: how does that fit in with the strategic plan? And how in turn do the various support structures of the university work to ensure the implementation of the plan? Very often there is a disconnect."

(UMT Member (f))

The scale and pace of change in higher education in the last two decades coupled with the increasing constraints on available resources necessitated a higher level of strategic thinking by university managers, resulting in a deeply altered approach to strategic planning. It has evolved from a cumbersome, uncoordinated, inward looking process to a more business like ambitious outward looking enterprise. The strategic plans of Universities A and B provide clarity on organisational priorities, which are articulated through key performance indicators and three year targets. The relatively recent organisational restructuring of both Universities A and B promotes a devolved decision-making structure which is intended to enable greater consultation regarding organisational direction. A high level of isomorphism is evident in the missions and priorities of the universities, which is understandable given that they share many external and internal features. Both are competing for funding from the same limited sources. Both aspire to recruit high achieving students to upgrade facilities, to strengthen student programmes and services, to pursue higher levels of research, and ultimately to be recognised for their efforts in their position on global and national rankings. To succeed in this demanding environment it is more important than ever to ensure that the professional development supports in place for academic staff are working optimally.

The public higher education sector in Ireland is currently in a state of transition. Government funding for universities has dropped dramatically from approximately eighty-five per cent in 2009 to approximately sixty per cent in 2013. Leaner models are being introduced at a national level (already in place for public sector procurement and for technology transfer) and leaner business processes are being strongly encouraged at local levels. Nationally there is an emphasis on ensuring that the higher education landscape is one that is attractive to international students. In this regard, clustering and in some cases mergers are being encouraged. Adding to the university's pressures, it is anticipated that new legislation will be in place later this year to allow some of the larger Institutes of Technology to apply for University of Technology status. Further reforms include the new performance based funding model which is being rolled out by the HEA in 2014. To compete in this context, universities will need to demonstrate that they are achieving their performance objectives. Their investment in professional development of academic staff should be contributing towards these achievements.

6.1.2 Management of professional development provision

The findings reveal that professional development of academics is not being managed as a priority in the two universities studied. There is an assumption by university senior managers that professional development is happening, but an absence of clarity on the processes, mechanisms and outcomes of same. It emerged that professional development is not a topic that is well understood and so its potential to contribute to the university's objectives is not adequately considered. The basic considerations around structures in place for provision of professional development, cost, reach and impact would benefit from greater management attention.

In practice this study has found that the structure in place for staff development provision is predicated on the organic way in which staff development has grown historically within the institution. It is not the outcome of any strategic decision making processes regarding effective organisational structures. It is widely acknowledged that the current piecemeal approach to the organisation of professional development, where several providers are separately catering for different aspects of developing the academic role is suboptimal. Three main recognised providers of professional development emerged in both universities, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, the HR department and the Information Services department (Library and Computer Centre). These units have distinct reporting lines and in general they operate separately, each determining their own agenda and schedules for delivery of professional development initiatives. It was found that none of the providers explicitly link their professional development provision with academic career progression or with university performance outcomes. The perceived lack of cohesive planning of professional development that meets both individual and organisational needs emerged as a considerable weakness in the management of professional development provision for academic staff. In general, for academic staff the availability of professional development opportunities appears random and unplanned. The numerous emails that are being sent by the different providers regarding a disparate range of development sessions are often overlooked or deleted by academics that do not perceive them as relevant or urgent enough to warrant the time it would take to engage.

At the levels of university management and professional development providers there was an absence of consciousness regarding the extent of the university's spend on professional development provision. In the current climate of limited funding and growing public demand for value for money, there should be greater clarity around such significant aspects of university expenditure. Given the distributed model that is in place in both universities, with several different units contributing, it is necessarily a complex task to calculate the total university spend. In University B there was a notable reluctance to answer questions about budgets. This reluctance to engage with such questions may well be that they didn't know the clear answers but may also be attributed to a sensitivity around reducing budget allocations in a difficult financial climate. In University A there was a greater willingness to talk about the spend on such initiatives and through follow-up communications with interviewees and the university's finance office, it was possible to estimate the university's spend on professional development of academics at two per cent of academic pay costs. This sum is consistent with the institutional spend of HEI's in the UK on all staff development, which was estimated to be two percent of total staff costs (Burguoyne *et al.* 2009). It was evident in both universities studied that managers are not mindful with regard to the cost of professional development. If the extent of the investment in this area is not clear, then university management cannot know what is appropriate to demand or expect as a return on the investment. In both cases it was notable that senior university managers were not even clear on the extent of activity in this area, or whether or not the current provision was in line with university priorities.

The different providers of professional development initiatives expressed different perceptions of what constitutes professional development and their approaches to delivery vary. The Centre for Teaching and Learning sees itself as an academic department and views academic staff development as a scholarly activity, one which necessitates a slow reflective individual approach to development. They reject the notion of quick-fix 'training' as professional development and consider the term and its associated methodologies as inappropriate for academics. There was evidence of an underlying tension between the Centres for Teaching and Learning and the HR departments with regard to methodologies appropriate to the development of academics. The HR and Information Services departments (Library's and Computer Centres) primarily see themselves as service departments. They have no hesitation in referring to their work as provision of training, and often use deficit models to design and deliver professional development initiatives.

The absence of clarity on what constitutes professional development for academics among the professional development providers transcends to the consumers of their activities. The case studies revealed instances of academic staff who claimed that their university had not provided any professional development opportunities for them, despite them having engaged with a wide range of opportunities. This is not a good outcome for the university or the academic. When professional development is being delivered, this should be clear to participants. If there is greater clarity around what constitutes professional development then the expectation that it should yield outcomes linked to individual and university performance goals naturally follows. The articulation of expected outcomes is paramount to underpin good policy and planning with regard to professional development and would be helpful in aligning the funding of professional development initiatives with wider university performance objectives.

The reach of any professional development initiative is an important metric. It appeared that the reach of the development initiatives of the Centre for Teaching and Learning is largely the academic staff who are already enthusiastic about their teaching role. There is evidence of repeat custom where the same faces are appearing at many of the sessions provided. Many academics opt not to engage to any great extent and the main criticism was that it does not reach those who need it most. The reach of professional development provision initiatives of all the providers was difficult to assess due to poor record keeping practices. It emerged that record keeping is not being encouraged by the university as it has a tendency to place more value on measures of activity of size than of results. University management evaluate professional development simply by the number of participants in the range of programmes provided. Often it does not seek reports on the reach, the impact or outcome of development initiatives. This is not uncommon; in their study of leadership development in the UK Burgoyne *et al* (2009, p.5) reported that much evaluation is informal and that "explicit and systematic evaluation of development programmes is not the norm". Given the recent HEA focus on performance evaluation, it would be wise for Irish universities to take a more systematic methodical approach to record keeping and to the evaluation of professional development provision. Better record keeping would show patterns and trends in

engagement, which would in turn inform future delivery. Professional development opportunities should be more closely linked to the achievement of performance outcomes that are meeting both the needs of academics and the overall university targets.

Findings from the two case studies bring a new sense of urgency to the reforms that are required to ensure that professional development provision is fit for purpose in Irish universities. There are many ways that the universities studied can enhance the current approach to professional development provision so that it will better meet the needs of academics and of the university. Alternative approaches are suggested later in this chapter, but firstly it is helpful to understand how and why academics are engaging with the provision that is currently in place.

6.2 Engagement of academics with professional development initiatives

Many of the changes taking place in higher education today have significant staff development implications and it is important that the provision already in place is attracting those who need it most. The second objective of this research was to develop an understanding of how and why academic staff engage with the development opportunities in their universities. There were a number of common findings in the two case studies relevant to this objective. In summary, it was found that the term professional development means different things to different people. Engagement with professional development opportunities is not compulsory for academics and so a high level of voluntarism was found with regard to engagement in professional development initiatives in both cases. Academics tend to engage in sessions that meet their individual interests and with those that have a tangible link with career progression, albeit there were few examples of such. It was found that professional development opportunities availed of outside of the university setting, for instance attendance at conferences relevant to the individual's discipline, are more highly valued by academics than those delivered internally. There was strong consensus that effective mentoring is a highly valued form of professional development. In both universities the barriers to engagement with development opportunities are perceived as pressures of time, a lack of awareness of available opportunities, conservatism, lack of incentives, and perceived lack of relevance. Most academics interviewed referred to the informal and tacit development they experienced in their day to day work as significant to their professional growth.

Nixon (1996) highlights the vulnerability of academics as an occupational group, and suggests that the reconstruction of their professional identity is necessary. Incompatible structures are emerging with different academic groupings, with academics at different levels being occupied on different tasks and pursuing disparate interests. This study revealed that many academics have such heavy workloads that they are not taking the time to step back and see if their work is fitting in with their career aspirations or with the goals of their employers. Clarity on academic professional identity is very important for academic career mobility, where reputation and influence outside of the institution

in which they practice is becoming increasingly relevant (Nixon 1996). Universities need to provide more clarity on academic roles and career pathways to enable academics to better shape and model their careers through their behaviour and professional development choices. When it comes to the academic career pathway Strike (2005) argues that definitions and classifications must give way to competencies or standards of output as the differentiating measure. The traditional simple vertical ladder of career progression from Lecturer, to Senior Lecturer, to Associate Professor and Professor is not sufficient to describe the wide range of roles and titles that exist in practice. To enable high performance, it is necessary for staff to understand their jobs and to have a sense of the potential for their future development (Tiernan *et al.* 2006).

Academics have their own role to play in exploring what it means to be a professional in the contexts in which they live and work, and in providing evidence that their collegial processes for the maintenance of academic standards are vigorous and valid (Dill 2005). A necessary starting point is a collective agreed concept on what constitutes professional development. This study found that professional development means different things to different people. Many academics associate their professional development with their individual achievements, like publishing an article, or speaking at a conference. Some refer to their participation with the formal sessions run by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, or with the Computer Centre, as professional development, others do not. The catch-all term of professional development clearly needs to be unpacked in order to achieve a collective understanding regarding what constitutes professional development for an academic. The academic community need to define professional development for themselves so that they can be confident that they are making the right professional development choices.

Universities in Ireland do not require academics to engage in professional development and so participation in such activities is largely voluntary. In some cases there is an expectation that academics would complete a Certificate in Teaching and Learning within their first three years in the role, or that Heads of School would participate in leadership training, but in reality participation is not compulsory and there is no sanction if academics opt not to engage. It emerged that many academics are not strategic about their professional development and it is rare for them to plan or to seek out such opportunities. The exception to this is possibly early-career academics, who in some cases need to report on their engagement with professional development to the research bodies that fund their work. Also the early-career academic is more likely to seek development opportunities that will either help them to secure a permanent position in the university, or to transfer their skills and build on them towards another career path. In contrast, more often than not, established academics will overlook the emails they receive regarding upcoming professional development sessions, especially if they are sent from a central department. While they are more likely to engage in a session that is organised by their own academic department, they will quickly consider a range of factors before deciding whether to engage or to delete. The thought process was described by one interviewee as follows:

“The first question will be if it comes centrally, do I need to do that, not really, bluntly and then the second one is, if it’s the department, can I get out of it? My value judgement will take a few seconds and it will be, do I need to do that, no. Who is it coming from? Will I get into trouble if I don’t do it? No, bang, gone!”
(Mid-career Academic)

The fact that many academics simply ignore the emails that are being sent from central departments like the Library, HR, and the Centre for Teaching and Learning, may be due to the weak identity link that they have with the university. For academics the professional development pursued outside of their own university is in general considered more significant than that which is delivered internally. The principle loyalty for most academics is to their discipline and so it is not a surprising finding that externally provided professional development that is closely linked to the academic discipline, like attendance at conferences for instance, is more highly valued than development opportunities provided internally. The high level of autonomy enjoyed by academics in Ireland and the opposition some have to managerial practices may make them opposed to any university efforts to ‘develop’ them, especially if the objective of the development is towards the achievement of organisation goals. One interviewee described the challenge very well:

“It is not so much that there wasn’t leadership and management training available but that those who participated in it, very often didn’t agree with it ... Many academics see that the fundamental nature of a university is a loose coupling of individual geniuses who are given freedom to go their own way and so they are fundamentally opposed to the notion of a single vision and of a single leader ... so how do you train or provide professional development in that situation?”
(UMT Member (f))

It is imperative that professional development providers understand the nature of academic identity and that they design their initiatives with their audience in mind. The model of academic motivation postulated by Blackmore and Kandiko (2011) is helpful in understanding academic behaviours in relation to professional development. This model suggests that there are three distinct, yet overlapping, factors that influence academic behaviour: financial, academic, and prestige. Within each disciplinary community there are certain expectations and achievements to be met in order to fit in, and meeting these expectations will be a priority for academics. For an academic’s work to have intellectual value, it needs the approval of colleagues in the discipline. Therefore academics are more likely to engage in professional development opportunities that will enhance their intellectual positioning and prestige within their discipline. They will also be motivated to some extent by the potential for financial gain for themselves and their academic department.

While the focus of this study was on formal professional development opportunities provided by the university, the case studies reveal that much academic development is informal and is acquired tacitly through social encounters and through experience of

learning on the job. This finding is consistent with the literature that acknowledges the value of development which takes place on a day to day basis in departments, professional settings and research sites. It is reported that up to seventy per cent of all developmental learning happens on the job (Jennings and Wagnier 2011). Such informal development can take the form of exchanges with colleagues, interacting with students, working on problems, participating on committees, researching, writing, or any other aspect of academic practice. These informal learning activities should not be ignored by the university and indeed they should be acknowledged and incorporated into professional development policies, models, and practice.

6.3 Professional development and university performance

It can be argued that on-going professional development of academic staff is necessary to enable them to progress in their careers and to more effectively contribute to the achievement of the university's strategic goals. Yet the role of academic professional development in contributing to university strategic goals is given little attention by management or by the professional development providers. The third objective of this study was to identify ways in which professional development of academic staff can contribute to the performance of the university. In both universities studied it was found that no serious effort is being made by the university to make or evaluate links between professional development and organisational performance. However there was evidence of a strong perception that professional development can contribute to the achievement of the university performance goals related to research, teaching and learning, the student experience, and engagement. The correlation between professional development and university performance is complex but is possible to evaluate. Because of the quantitative nature of the research output indicators, the impact of professional development related to research is easier to evaluate than that which relates to teaching and learning or engagement.

The *Irish National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* emphasises maximisation of performance of the higher education system. In an effort towards implementing the national strategy the HEA is developing a more comprehensive approach to evaluation of institutional performance. Institutional profiles have been developed and published and these will provide an initial basis for evaluating performance against performance indicators which universities will agree with the HEA, and which must reflect national priorities. The institutional profiles template focuses on the three core dimensions of higher education, teaching and learning, research and engagement. Some ways in which professional development can contribute to the performance indicators of each of these dimensions are now discussed.

6.3.1 Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning is one of the dimensions of the university's activity for which it is difficult to establish satisfactory indicators of performance quality. The performance indicators used by both universities A and B, as articulated in their strategic plans, are clearly influenced by those used in university rankings systems. The two most

influential rankings systems are the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University Academic Ranking of World Universities. A major criticism of these rankings is their elevation of research and institutional reputation above teaching and learning. Their limitations in accurately assessing performance have been well documented, but nonetheless they continue to have a major influence on universities local performance indicators. The indicators of performance in teaching and learning of the two universities studied include:

- Intake of high achieving students;
- Student retention / progression rates;
- Number of undergraduate programmes with student-involved research from first year onwards;
- Number of undergraduate programmes with embedded student placement opportunity;
- Number of e-learning students enrolled;
- Percentage of students studying part-time / through flexible learning;
- Proportion of postgraduate students;
- Participation rates of non-traditional students;
- Number of staff with formal qualifications in teaching and learning;
- Number of graduates in employment or further study;
- Student satisfaction score in student surveys.

The argument that these indicators are limited in their ability to accurately evaluate the performance of a university's teaching and learning activity is beyond the scope of this research. Although flawed, these indicators do serve as proxies for teaching and learning performance and so the professional development related to teaching and learning ought to be able to contribute to the achievement of at least one of these goals, either directly or indirectly. However, professional development related to teaching and learning does not often begin with an institutional performance objective in mind, and its contribution to achieving university performance objectives is rarely evaluated.

To align better with organisational goals, the professional development provider should consider taking a performance-led approach to the design of some professional development initiatives. Take for instance the performance indicator regarding student retention and progression. A scoping exercise to identify the programmes with poor retention and progression using data from the student records systems could be a useful starting point of such an initiative. Having identified the problem programmes, a deeper look at the failure rates in associated modules would reveal those modules that students are finding difficult. Focus groups with staff teaching the modules and with students taking modules with high failure rates would reveal the problem areas, which may include curriculum design, assessment modes, troublesome knowledge, teaching methodologies etc. A targeted approach to development of staff teaching these modules would be expected to resolve the problem areas to some extent and consequently to have a positive impact on programme retention and progression rates. This development

would also meet individual professional goals in relation to improved teaching performance and higher student satisfaction rates.

This example is intended to be illustrative rather than comprehensive in demonstrating how professional development can better correlate with university performance. The potential resistance of staff to engage in the development, the difficulty in establishing causal links, and other complex issues are acknowledged. The expertise that would be required of the professional development provider to implement such an initiative in a sensitive, supportive way is also recognised. In order to get buy-in, the benefit to the participants would need to be explicit. Notwithstanding its limitations, this approach of starting professional development initiatives with end goal objectives in mind would better enable the providers to demonstrate the success of their efforts, and their contribution to the achievement of university goals.

6.3.2 Research

The productivity, quality and status of research are central to the mission of the universities studied. Both have a strong focus on research performance in global rankings and their performance indicators for research are clearly influenced by their ambition to climb the university ranking ladders. The indicators of research performance used by the universities studied include:

- Number of research centres;
- Research income;
- Publishing output;
- Citation index;
- Number of staff supervising PhDs;
- Number of doctoral graduates.

Both Universities A and B have articulated ambitious research targets. The achievement of these targets will be accelerated when all academic staff are appropriately supported to develop their capacity for high research performance. This study revealed that academics perceive that they are not adequately supported in their research role. Each of the universities has research support services in place, to a greater or lesser extent, but academics interviewed did not perceive that appropriate support was available. Many suggested that success in the research role was largely due to an individual's luck. This is not a healthy perspective. Given the centrality of the research function and its importance to the university's reputation, this perceived dependence on luck is totally inadequate. University managers need to ensure the availability and visibility of appropriate professional development opportunities that enhance an academics capacity to achieve expected research outputs. Those units that are already providing support for research need to ensure that what they are already doing is appropriate, and if so it needs to be more visible and accessible to academics.

If appropriate support is in place then it should be reasonable to expect that the professional development opportunities related to the research role can be correlated with the quantitative indicators used to measure research performance. Documenting the research performance of individual academics before and after the professional development interventions would provide evidence of the added value of such initiatives, both for the academic and for the university.

6.3.3 Engagement

The quantifiable outcomes of the commercialisation of research activity like numbers of patents, income generated from patents, licences, spin-outs and start-ups are those that are often measured in terms of a department's performance in relation to engagement. Less tangible outcomes like the impact on society of educational outreach projects, community based initiatives, public events, and consultation services are more difficult to establish. The performance indicators of engagement used by the universities studied include:

- Number of start-ups;
- Number of jobs created;
- Links with industry;
- Public participation in outreach activities;
- Engagement in community research projects;
- International partnerships.

In the universities studied, there was no evidence of professional development opportunities that are specifically focused on the achievement of the indicators above. That is not to say that some of the existing professional development offered doesn't contribute to the academics success in this role, it's just that the link is not explicit. The development opportunities relating to leadership and those that provide networking opportunities may well impact on an academics capacity to generate links with industry or inspire them to establish outreach programmes, but these objectives are not established. The professional development being provided is not clear about its potential to contribute to these goals, resulting in a situation where academics feel unsupported by appropriate professional development opportunities. The goals and potential benefits of professional development need to be articulated at the outset and where they link to organisational goals this connection should be made visible.

6.4 Enhancing Professional Development Provision

6.4.1 Organisational structures supporting delivery of professional development

There are many policy imperatives that should focus the attention of university management on the necessity to provide appropriate professional development for academic staff. For instance, the report of the European Commission (2013, p.31) recommends that "all staff teaching in higher education institutions in 2020 should have received certified pedagogical training". It also recommends that "continuous

professional education as teachers should become a requirement for teachers in the higher education sector”. University management have a role to ensure that there is an appropriate balance of development opportunities available to support the academic in all aspects of their role. The fourth and final objective of this study is to make recommendations on how formal offerings of professional development for academic staff can be better organised and managed to enhance university performance. Findings from the case studies give rise to many such recommendations which are detailed in this section.

In their strategic plans the universities have articulated clear strategic objectives in a variety of domains including teaching, research, and engagement. If the university has an expectation that academic staff will contribute significantly to the achievement of these goals, then there is an obligation on the university to provide adequate opportunities for academics to develop the requisite knowledge and skills to perform. It is probable that many of the formal professional development activities being delivered are already loosely feeding into the achievement of these high-level objectives. To tighten this connection the university needs a professional development strategy that will make these links more explicit. Development programmes will generate greater value for the university when the curricula reflect organisational performance metrics (Cermak and McGurk 2010). By tying the professional development activities more closely to university key performance metrics, and then measuring its impact on them, universities can generate greater value from their investment in this area. For instance if there is an objective to increase retention rates, then the question is – did they go up? Evaluations will continue to have their methodological problems and causality will always be difficult to prove, however if the right metrics are used, the added value of the professional development initiative will be evident. Similarly with research - if the goal is to increase publications then professional development initiatives should be designed to focus academics on how to get published and to support them through the journey through coaching or mentoring.

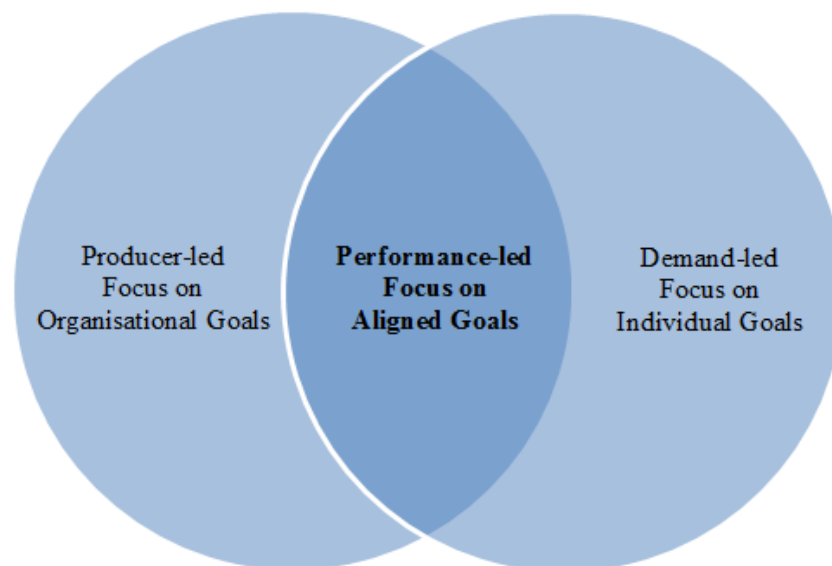
In the current fragmented approach to professional development, it is largely the professional development providers that are deciding what to offer. In effect, it is a producer-led model. The case studies show that this approach is suboptimal. To enhance the current approach universities need to make management decisions on where and how to invest in professional development. There are several options that can be considered. Decisions on what to offer could be based on potential to contribute to university performance goals. However, given the weak identity links that academics have with the university, such an approach will hardly be enough to motive academics to participate. As noted by Hedley (2010), most academics have little interest in making the university run like a well-oiled machine. Therefore they are not likely to engage in formal professional development sessions unless it meets their own performance objectives or at least those of their School.

A second option is to let academics suggest the areas in which they would benefit from professional development. In this demand-led approach, academics would

systematically be asked to suggest professional development topics or activities that help them to perform better in their role. Both universities studied already have performance management and development systems in place that could be modified to facilitate this demand-led approach. However, the case studies showed that many academics are not aware of what forms of development will benefit them in their career, or what will help them to meet the universities objectives. In reality the academic feels far removed from the university management team and consequently they are often not in tune with the bigger picture university objectives. Many of them don't understand the fit between their work and the strategic objectives of the university, and often find that their tangible outputs do not reflect the time they are spending at work. During the interviews, it emerged that academics would appreciate more guidance on the types of professional development they should engage with. In this context, a demand-led approach is not likely to contribute to the university objectives to the extent necessary to justify the cost.

In designing a more effective approach to professional development it is important to elucidate the link between organisational goals, professional development activities, and individual academic goals. In this sense a hybrid model integrating producer-led and demand-led approaches is recommended. This would take a performance-led approach as demonstrated in figure 1.

Figure 3. Performance-led framework for designing professional development initiatives



Although outside the scope of this research, the importance of integrating the potential contribution of informal and tacit forms of development into the design of professional activities is acknowledged. Before allocating any resources to professional development activities it should be demonstrated how a given initiative is expected to impact on individual performance goals, how this in turn will impact on organisation goals, and how the impact will be measured. Many of the university performance goals look

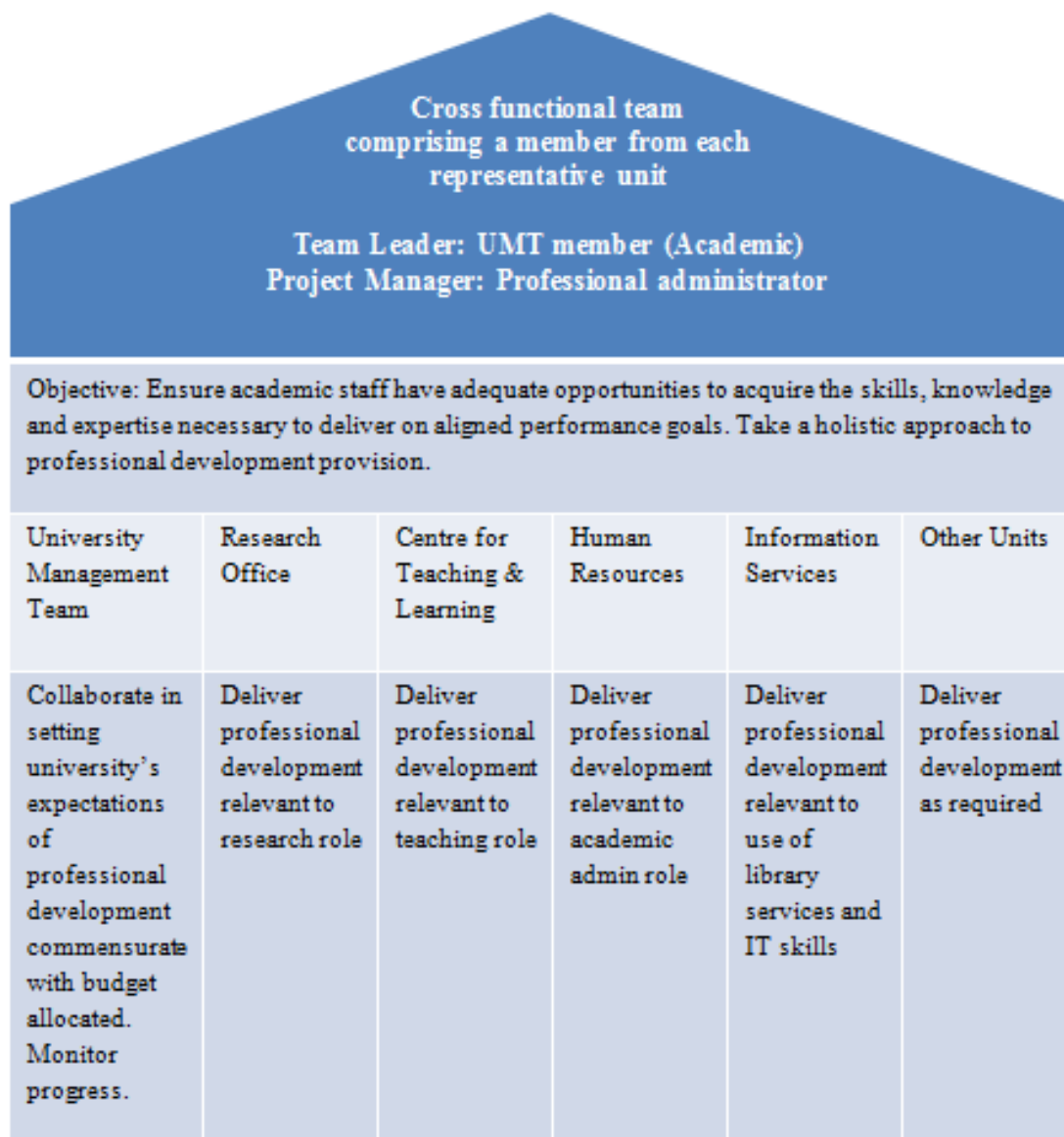
towards the level of the academic department for performance, or even at the level of a specific programme or research group. For this reason, in some cases, in using the performance-led framework, it may be useful and more relevant to align the individual goal with the academic department goal and then with the organisation goal.

This approach to professional development provision would necessitate an appropriate infrastructure to deliver on it. The case studies revealed that there is merit in maintaining a range of providers of professional development, each with their own area of expertise. This finding is consistent with findings of other research which suggests that a single approach to development or the centralisation of development in to a single unit may not be successful (Blackmore 2009). A more effective model would maintain the existing providers, but coordinate their work in such a way as all are working towards a cohesive professional development plan. One of the two main providers in most universities is the Centre for Teaching and Learning, but this would not be the best location to coordinate all professional development for academics, given its bias towards the teaching function. Findings from this study would also suggest that HR should not be the body responsible for coordinating professional development. HR-based academic developers are considered by many academics not to have a developed understanding of academic work or to be sufficiently connected to academic space and so it is not perceived as a scholarly location for academic staff development (Blackmore 2009; Blackmore *et al.* 2010). This notion is supported by Guest and Clinton's (2007) research which suggests that the individuality, idiosyncrasy, innovation and risk-taking qualities of many academics is in stark contrast with an administrative function like HR with its concern for consistency, order and systems of regulation and control that emphasise risk-avoidance.

In the performance-led approach to professional development a model that maintains the existing units but coordinates their activities through a cross-functional team which is professionally managed is proposed. In this model each unit is represented on a cross functional team which would be tasked to ensure that academic staff have adequate opportunities to acquire the skills, knowledge and expertise necessary to carry out their roles effectively. This team would have responsibility to ensure that there is a holistic approach to development. To get credibility from those it seeks to serve, the cross functional team would need to be led by an academic representative from the university management team. A senior professional administrator would be in place as project manager and would work with the full range of providers to ensure a cohesive approach to delivery. This organisation structure is illustrated in figure 2. Findings from the case studies strongly suggest that this structure would result in a more cohesive, integrated, managed approach to professional development that would better meet the expectations of individual academics and of the university management team. The literature would support the notion that this more sophisticated approach, where development is facilitated by a range of agencies and departments with a semi-permeable membrane is likely to be more effective than the current silo model that is in place (Blackmore and Castley 2006). Maintaining the full range of providers will allow for development

opportunities that have a scholarly focus as well as those that have a strategic focus, and will allow for integrated and inclusive approaches (Blackmore 2009).

Figure 4. Organisational structure to support a performance-led approach to professional development delivery



This model which maintains the full range of providers but coordinates their work to better meet the aligned individual, departmental and organisational needs mitigates the risk identified by Blackmore *et al.* (2010) that individual or group needs will be lost to a generic common denominator. It allows specific disciplinary, professional and occupational needs to be addressed. In this model the Project Manager would take a meta-view of development (Blackmore 2009) taking responsibility to work with the cross functional team to ensure a more structured approach to designing professional development initiatives that will meet individuals' development needs and the needs of their Schools while simultaneously aligning them with university objectives. With this approach existing professional development programmes would be reviewed to assess

and enhance their impact on the university, and new initiatives would be designed with performance goals in mind.

Wagnier (2011) provides some useful pointers in designing effective professional development initiatives that will have an impact. He suggests that the first step in any professional development initiative should be an assessment of its potential impact. This assessment will inform the design and approach to delivery, it will identify the performance indicators that will be affected by the specific initiative and will influence the budget allocated. A scoping exercise will help to determine the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved. This exercise is followed by listing the work practices that affect these indicators. Leibowitz et al. (2011) support the notion of aligning goals of change projects with university priorities suggesting that this alignment is conducive to achieving expected outcomes. The goals of the professional development initiative should be clearly articulated, which may include specifying the changes to practice that the development is expected to bring about. The evaluation of existing initiatives should lead to clarity on what types of development are appropriate for academics, and should inform decisions on whether to maintain, modify or abandon current efforts (Tourish 2012).

In designing new initiatives, an approach to consider is to start with the performance goal or key performance indicator in mind. The knowledge, skills or attitudes required of staff to achieve the goal can then be identified. It would then be possible to assess where there are gaps in the required levels of knowledge, skill or attitude. Finally the staff that will need to develop these skills can be identified and a professional development initiative tailored that will align the individual development needs with the organisational goal.

This proposed model would not support an overly mechanistic or bureaucratic approach to the design and delivery of professional development initiatives as this would stifle the intrinsic creativity of developers and would be unattractive to participants. However the current approach which is overly detached from achievement of any outcomes deprives stakeholders of reassurance about the value of professional development initiatives. The key is to strike an appropriate balance between autonomy and accountability and to provide development opportunities that align individual and organisational goals.

6.4.2 Process improvements and professional standards frameworks

Many academics interviewed for this study indicated that they would welcome more guidance on their professional development and particularly how this can link with career progression. The findings revealed that academic developers operate a largely *ad hoc* approach to selection and scheduling of professional development initiatives which leaves academics wondering about the relevance of the disparate range of often unrelated topics that are randomly made available. The random approach to selection of professional development topics is somewhat understandable given that academic developers are working in the absence of Professional Standards Frameworks (PSF) or CPD frameworks. The

HEA suggested in 2011 that the new National Forum for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education would be tasked “to work with higher education institutions and other relevant parties to establish and manage a professional standards framework, which will formally record and recognise the continuing professional development of higher education professionals in academic practice” (HEA 2011).

There is a strong relationship between the provision of CPD for professionals and the development of a PSF, with many professions now requiring evidence of attending CPD activities for continuing registration. A PSF aims to articulate the initial qualifications and the continuing professional development requirements for a particular profession. In many cases professional bodies or associations undertake the role of accrediting, recognising and recording training and qualifications. In general, the professional association articulates, monitors, and reviews the relevant standards for their profession and ensures the requirements for CPD are achieved by their members. If the HEA is proposing a PSF be developed for the academic profession it is important to provide clarification on what is meant by standards. Is it a basis of comparison that has been determined by experts or authorities in the field; or a basis of conformity to which all must subscribe; or does it refer to a set of principles or checkpoints to inform judgements? (Krause *et al.* 2012). The concepts of threshold and non-threshold standards need to be articulated, whereby some standards are deemed crucial without which the academic cannot be deemed professional, nor proceed on the path of CPD to achieve other standards.

Higher education institutions have complex staffing structures with the academic staff encompassing individuals from a wide range of professional areas including medical doctors, barristers, architects, engineers, and so on. In Ireland and elsewhere, each of these professional areas has their own PSF, to which associated academics must conform in order to maintain their professional standing. For instance, academics who are practicing medical doctors must register with the Irish Medical Council and are legally obliged to maintain their professional competence through engagement in 250 hours of CPD over each five year cycle (Irish Medical Council 2006). A similar set up is in place for Barristers. The Bar Council of Ireland operates a strict PSF for practicing barristers within the Irish judicial system. A barrister is required to attain ten CPD points during each year, where CPD activities include for example, attendance at accredited conferences or seminars, teaching, training, chairing, research, and writing. Having attained the required ten CPD points, the members can then self-certify (Bar Council of Ireland 2012).

In Ireland, and internationally, there are many further examples of frameworks for professional standards and CPD for recognised professions. Few countries however appear to have developed such a framework for the academic profession, with the exception of the UK. The UK PSF was designed by the HEA UK to support the initial and continuing professional development of staff engaged in teaching and supporting learning in higher education. The objective of the framework is to foster dynamic

approaches to teaching and learning, and to demonstrate the professionalism that exists in higher education teaching to students and other stakeholders. The framework is multi-layered. For each of the levels of membership of the HEA UK (Associate Fellow, Fellow, Senior Fellow and Principal Fellow) descriptors are provided to illustrate the level of performance which would be appropriate (HEA UK 2011). The HEA UK provides accredited programmes in teaching and learning in higher education and links these, as well as on-going CPD activities, with the PSF. In the UK registration with the HEA UK or, indeed, any formal qualification in teaching is not a legal requirement for those who teach in higher education. However the UKPSF has been widely adopted. In a study by Gosling (2010), a survey of 82 institutions found that 80% required new staff to either complete all or part of a Postgraduate Certificate in teaching and learning or equivalent. In a further 13% engagement with the programme is compulsory. However the UK PSF is strongly criticised in the literature for its disproportionate focus on the academic function of teaching and supporting the student learning experience. It has been accused of being individually focused, of not recognising the collaborative nature of much academic work, and of ignoring the academic functions of research, administration and community engagement (Bamber 2009).

If a PSF is going to be developed for academics working in Ireland it must take into account the political and cultural realities of how universities work (Bamber 2009). A framework that is created collaboratively and that includes people from a wide range of disciplines is likely to command more credibility within the academic community if it aligns with stakeholder expectations and is embedded in institutional reward structures (Bucklow and Clark 2003). Dialogue should be on-going to ensure that the programme of activities within the framework remains relevant. While work does not yet appear to be underway at a national level to develop a PSF for academic staff, it may be timely for academic developers to start developing a set of capabilities that equate to an academic literacy that spans all aspects of academic work, as suggested by Blackmore *et al.* (2010). Several authors support the notion of developing an institutional CPD framework that recognises the many ways academics learn and develop themselves within their community of practice, alongside more strategically focused provision (Bamber 2009; Bucklow and Clark 2003). Drawing on McNay's typologies of university cultures (according to loose or tight control and policy definition) Bamber (2009) suggests that the framework should be loose enough to allow independent decision-making by those with a range of needs, but tight enough to be recognisable as a formal structure with common, identifiable goals. Findings from this study suggest that such a framework would be welcomed by academics, who currently feel that they are unguided when it comes to their professional development needs. The framework would double up as a guide for academic developers in selecting professional development topics and in communicating their relevance to the target audiences.

6.4.3 Demonstrating the value of professional development

A common criticism of the performance indicators used by university management is that they are chosen more for their easy availability than for their accuracy and value in

measuring performance; it's a case of counting what can be measured rather than measuring what counts (Locke *et al.* 2008). When it comes to professional development performance indicators, universities often simply measure the number of people that have completed a specific course. They make no attempt to capture the value added by the development initiative, rendering them unable to provide a real insight into impact on individual or university performance.

The methodological challenges of evaluating the impact of professional development activities may have perpetuated their marginalisation within the university's priorities. In a time of turbulent change and financial ambiguity, university managers will need to demonstrate value for money in all aspects of university activity. The university spend on professional development is no exception and unless it can provide evidence of real impact, its on-going funding may be in jeopardy. Wagnier (2011) suggests that it is pointless to measure the benefits of a development session as soon as people leave the classroom, and yet the case studies revealed that this is the evaluation practice that is most commonly used. For instance, the use of "happy sheets" to evaluate the impact of professional development, as is the practice of the HR department in University B, belies the complexity of professional development work and ignores its potential to contribute to the bigger picture of organisational performance.

Professional development providers need to engage in more appropriate evaluation practices and they can learn from models that are commonly used elsewhere. For instance, the Kirkpatrick model is widely accepted as a useful model to evaluate development initiatives (Tourish 2012). This model comprises four levels of evaluation:

1. Reaction
2. Learning
3. Behaviour
4. Results

The types of evaluation used by professional development providers in Universities A and B are largely limited to level 1 of this model, seldom looking beyond the way in which participants perceived the initiative, its usefulness, if they enjoyed it, etc. Learner satisfaction is important to determine, but it must be analysed with due caution and should be supplemented with deeper levels of evaluation. A principle of the Kirkpatrick model is that the value of data increases at each level, but the complexity of the data equally increases. At the learning level for instance pre and post evaluations would be necessary in order to build a knowledge inventory and to set progress goals and to get the learner working towards personalised objectives. To evaluate at level 3 individual development plans or 360 feedback surveys could be considered. Level 4 would require the establishment of appropriate metrics that clearly link the objectives of the development initiative to university performance goals. Personal development plans or annual performance reviews can be useful for this level of evaluation. In order to assess the contribution of professional development to organisational goals it is necessary to engage in results oriented evaluations that measure changes in participants learning, their work behaviours, and the consequent results.

This level of evaluation would not be necessary for all professional development initiatives, but should be considered for those that are expected to have organisational impact. As with all evaluations there will be limitations in any effort to assess the contribution of professional development to organisational goals and acknowledging the limitations will be helpful in interpreting the reliability and validity of the results.

6.5 Conclusion

Giddens structuration theory and Bourdieu's concept of cultural and social reproduction can help with further analysis of the findings. As the Irish Government and the HEA accumulate social resources, they are better positioned to influence practice according to their own values in the academic field. Recent years have seen increasing calls for the professionalisation of academics. In the case of the Irish sector, funding has been made available by the HEA on a number of occasions on a competitive basis over the last two decades to strengthen professional development programmes and centres in higher education institutions. The recent introduction of university performance compacts is evidence of the HEA promoting institutional self-knowledge within the academic field through good management practices and organisational formulae to encourage self-reflective practice based on externally imposed criteria (Deer 2003). Deer (2003) warns that with such an approach, the new knowledge generated is likely to be used to challenge traditional professional expertise. Using Bourdieu's concept of reproductive principles it could be perceived that the social capital of the HEA is being used to incentivise universities to perpetuate managerial practices through academic agents. The HEA can accumulate financial capital through controlling university funding models and through their selective allocation of funding for specific targeted initiatives of their choosing. Legal power has been used to limit academic employment through the employment control framework which has been in place in recent years and ideological power has been accumulated through the promotion of a discourse based on managerial principals and economic rationality (Deer 2003). A competitive environment has been created for higher education in Ireland, while the principles of autonomy continue to be claimed through the process of devolution. Increasingly institutions are competing with each other for limited funding and the introduction of institutional quality assessments and performance based funding is further evidence of the State using its influence to align academic and economic interests. The widespread focus on marketisation and commercialisation in universities and the adoption of university ranking systems sees the academic field more closely echoing the economic field in terms of practice and habitus than ever before.

Webb (1996b) is critical of the league tables and performance measures on teaching and research. He suggests that such mechanisms are "ideological interpretations which can be challenged with regard to structural inequalities at the beginning of the exercise" and that the 'rules' or 'formulae' favour the already favoured (p.25). He argues that the only way forward is for people to be aware of the power relations of the discourse and to attempt to gain some control of the discourse/practice, rather than accepting and following the views of those most rewarded by the particular power relationships of the

discourse. The model for staff development provision postulated by this study supports this argument. By working cohesively in a cross functional team effort, this model supports an approach to development whereby professional development providers facilitate individual academics to inform and influence the professional development programme, while simultaneously being cognisant of making links with the wider performance goals of the university.

Findings from this study support Webb's (1996b) argument that development is not a unitary concept. The new model of development provision postulated in this study supports the notion that development can be interpreted according to various ontological and epistemological standpoints, and that each of the development providers within the university have something to offer from their approach to development provision. However the findings do not support Webb (1996a) in his view that development should have "no preordained end point, no predetermined direction, no pre-planned purpose and no necessary stages along the way" (p.32). This would be a convenient approach for professional development units to take, as such a concept of development releases them from any accountability or responsibility to their stakeholders. It is perhaps such an unfocused approach that can leave academics, who engage with professional development programmes in good faith, disappointed when their efforts are not recognised in applications for promotion. It is perhaps such an approach to development, that leads some academics to think that their engagement with professional development provision is not development at all, but simply an opportunity to share experiences and frustrations with colleagues. It is perhaps such an approach to development that leads many academics to suggest that development opportunities provided by their university appear unplanned, random, and sometimes irrelevant. Findings from this study support a view of development that has clarity about learning outcomes from formal development objects. It suggests that professional development provision should be planned; it should have a clear articulated purpose, and should be guided by a framework with clear stages along the way that can map to an agreed professional standards framework that is acceptable to academics. It should be appropriately resourced to enable the achievement of its objectives. In this way professional development provision will be more accountable to the academics that engage with it, to the university management that provide the budget for it, and to the public purse that funds it.

This study recognises the legitimate reasons why many academics choose not to engage in the formal professional development initiatives provided by the university. If the perception is that the university is taking a mechanistic and naïve approach to development initiatives whereby "[e]vidence of attendance and bureaucratic attentiveness is presumed to be evidence of new learning" then it is not going to be successful (McWilliam 2002, p.8). The higher education development discourse has a structure defined by power relations. If the perception is that the development provision is serving non-academic, market-oriented or managerial objectives then academics are not likely to engage meaningfully with it. If professional development efforts attempt to restructure academic cultures to comply with market principles or commodify academic

practices, it will be counterproductive as it would likely only serve to “deter innovation, promote passive and instrumental attitudes to learning, threaten knowledge creation and entrench academic privilege” (Naidoo 2005, p.27). In an effort to gain credibility from those it purports to serve, the model for professional development postulated by this study is championed by an academic leader, one who fully understands the complexity of academic identity issues. This academic leader would need to be respected by academics as one that genuinely aspires towards the achievement of the university’s academic mission and one that will critique institutional policies and practices, without compromising institutional priorities.

The two case studies revealed interesting findings that were relevant to the research objectives and the analysis of findings in this chapter have contributed to answering the key research question of how the provision of professional development for academic staff can be optimised to enhance university performance. While this study has made an important contribution, it is not without its limitations and there is no doubt that this topic needs greater attention in the literature. There are many more questions that require further investigation. The concluding chapter provides some final reflections on this topic and presents recommendations for consideration by university managers, academic developers and academics respectively. It acknowledges the limitations of this piece of research and outlines a research agenda for future investigation of this important topic.

7.0 CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

In the fast evolving environment that is higher education today, university management teams are being advised to future proof their organisations (Barber *et al.* 2013; Ernst and Young 2013). If some of the more radical predictions are to be believed, then longevity is no guarantee of future performance and the traditional multipurpose universities offering a wide range of degrees and a modestly effective research programme have had their day. Future proofing the university has staff development implications as universities rely predominantly on their academic staff to achieve the organisational performance goals related to research, teaching and learning and community engagement. To succeed in what is an already crowded market, universities must make a conscious effort to equip their academic staff with the requisite capabilities to contribute to organisational performance.

External forces are often the impetus for prioritising projects in the university. Many external drivers calling for more formal professional development of academic staff have been highlighted in this study. With respect to the Irish higher education sector, the *National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* is an additional driver which indicates that universities “must ensure that all teaching staff are both qualified and competent in teaching and learning, and should support on-going development and improvement of their skills” (DES 2011, p.18). These drivers don’t seem to have filtered through to universities yet in terms of prioritising professional development of their academic staff. The OECD (2012) has observed that national regulations rarely require or prompt academics to be trained in pedagogy or to upgrade their educational competences over their professional lives. The case is similar for university managers with Fielden (2009) revealing that most managers reach senior positions of Vice President or Vice Chancellor with no formal development or training on management topics.

This study found that important questions regarding the coordination, location, and finance of professional development provision have not been given adequate consideration by university management teams in the universities studied. It is fair to say that in both institutions studied the professional development provision was found to be fragmented, lacking coordination and cohesive management. The units responsible for professional development provision openly recognised that there was room for improvement in their processes. Communication of development opportunities, record keeping and evaluation methodologies emerged as weaknesses in the process of professional development provision. With regard to academic staff it was revealed that a diverse range of understandings of professional development exist and that engagement with professional development outside of the university, which is linked to the discipline, is valued more than that which is available internally. Academic staff expressed that they would welcome more guidance on their own professional development and its link with career progression. There was strong consensus that the professional development opportunities that are currently available can support academic staff in achieving organisational goals but that the absence of effective

coordination and inadequate alignment with organisational goals is inhibiting their potential.

The level of active and enthusiastic engagement of interviewees and their interest in this study was encouraging. The responses to interview questions would suggest that all levels of the university, senior management, academic developers and academic staff, would like to see greater coordination of the existing range of provision, and to have a better indication of its impact. However, what is lacking in both cases is a person with sufficient authority who feels responsible to make this happen. Findings would suggest that the university would benefit from designating a senior academic manager as the champion of professional development. Clear roles and responsibilities should then be assigned to academic developers to ensure that the full range of formal professional development provision is coherent and coordinated in a way that will contribute to the aligned performance objectives of individuals, the academic department and the organisation. The framework and organisational structure for managing professional development presented in this study may be helpful in enhancing the potential of the professional development provision that is already available in universities.

The findings of this study make an important contribution to the literature. These findings lead to a range of practical recommendations for consideration by university managers, academic developers and academics. Before making these final recommendations it is worth reiterating that the findings should be understood in their context, which was outlined in the previous chapter, and that their limitations must be acknowledged.

7.1 Limitations of the study

Every research study is limited to an extent by the characteristics of design or methodology that can impact the application or interpretation of the findings. Several methodologies and research methods were considered in the design of this study. The case study was chosen as the most suitable approach for this piece of research and the methodological limitations of the methods used were detailed in chapter 3. A common criticism of the case study methodology is that the findings have limited generalisability. This limitation was not a particular problem for this study, as the intention was not to produce representative results across a population or to generalise its findings to the entire higher education sector. The objective is to contribute to the international body of literature some case examples of professional development models from the higher education sector in Ireland, and to generate some findings of practical value for the two institutions studied. The findings may be relevant and have potential implications beyond the local contexts but they do not claim to have sufficient reliability to be generalised. The findings of this study contribute to a greater understanding of how the formal offerings of professional development provision are organised and managed in two universities in Ireland. The investigation has identified strengths and limitations of existing provision and makes recommendations on how the

current approach might be better organised and managed to enhance the performance of the organisation. While there is no claim about the generalisability of the findings beyond the two universities studied, it is hoped that the recommendations may have wider application. In particular, the recommendations may be useful for the other five universities in the Irish higher education sector, considering the similarity of their external and internal context with those studied.

This study does not claim to provide the definitive solution to better management of professional development provision in universities. However it does aspire to serve as a useful piece of work that will resonate with staff at the three levels of the two universities studied. It is hoped that the research findings and the recommendations made will be helpful in raising the status of professional development and its potential to contribute to organisation goals. If professional development provision is to become a managed priority in universities there needs to be convincing evidence of its potential to contribute to organisational goals. It is hoped that the study's findings and the recommendations following will help universities to take a more conscious approach to the management of professional development provision and that implementation of the recommendations will result in professional development provision that will better contribute to the achievement of organisational goals.

7.2 Recommendations

The charge of demonstrating a clear link between investment in formal offerings of professional development and the ability of the university to achieve its performance goals is a big challenge, particularly in light of the dearth of empirical research related to this topic. In a climate where ambiguity regarding funding is one of the greatest concerns of university management, the risk that funding will be cut for professional development is very high. Now more than ever it is paramount that professional development providers can demonstrate a return on the university's investment in this area, in terms of discernible contribution to organisational goals. There is no shortage of literature showing important outputs and outcomes from individual professional development initiatives, particularly in the areas of teaching and learning and leadership. However these isolated examples of good practice have yet to be systematised into a coherent process which would enable the university to align development provision with organisational goals and ensure that its impact can be appropriately evaluated.

In the conduct of this study, the raising of questions that had not been asked before with university management, with professional development providers, and with academics, appeared to result in a deeper reflection by some individuals on the potential of professional development to enhance individual and organisational performance. University managers suggested that the topic should get more attention at senior management levels. Academic developers suggested a range of enhancements that they could make to their own processes. Individual academics acknowledged that they were not very strategic about their own development needs. It became evident that with

respect to professional development there is room for enhancement at all levels of the organisation. The findings of the two case studies highlight improvements that can be made at organisation, process and individual levels. In this section recommendations are presented separately for the three associated levels of the organisation: university management, professional development providers, and individual academic staff.

7.2.1 University Management

Futuristic studies are forecasting that to compete in the future, universities will need to significantly streamline their operations while simultaneously incorporating new teaching and learning delivery mechanisms. It has been suggested that the commercial skills and capability of the academic workforce will need to be deepened (Ernst and Young 2012). The biggest challenge to successful change management is current work practices. In their strategic plans, universities are documenting ambitious plans including the delivery of world class research-led teaching in face-to-face and in distance learning environments, to exceed global average levels of research impact, and to generate significant income from commercialisation and internationalisation efforts. The advancement of these ambitions has considerable staff development implications. If the university is serious about meeting its performance goals then it will need to put the appropriate structures and resources in place to facilitate the development of the operating core. The following recommendations are offered for consideration by university senior management:

- Find out the extent of the university's current investment in professional development of academic staff and expect a reasonable return on this investment;
- Collaborate with professional development providers in setting out the university's expectations of professional development initiatives commensurate with the budget allocated;
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of professional development providers;
- Task an interested academic member of the university management team with leading a cross-functional team to coordinate a holistic approach to professional development and to regularly report on professional development outcomes;
- Appropriately resource professional development providers to deliver on the articulated expectations;
- Ensure that the focus on development of academic managers is not disproportionate and that adequate levels of professional development are available for all categories of academic staff that cater for all aspects of the academic role;
- Understand that many of the objectives of professional development concern changes and outcomes that are not easily measured in the traditional sense and that the measurements currently sought are often not those that have the greatest impact on university performance (i.e. number of people that completed a specific course etc.);

- Reward what you value in terms of performance outcomes.

7.2.2 Professional development providers

Having been assigned clear roles and responsibilities by university management and with an appropriate budget allocated to meet high level expectations, the contribution of professional development towards achievement of organisational goals is in the hands of those designing and delivering the initiatives. It is important that professional development units are able to provide the university management with relevant outputs and outcomes of their provision. Universities should be in a position to say the percentage of staff in the university that have availed of professional development in specific areas. If there are high volumes of participation, as suggested by some of the professional development providers, highlighting the extent to which there has been engagement may encourage those that have been reluctant to engage to date.

Illuminating the extent to which engagement with such professional development can help with promotion would be another encouraging factor to attract better engagement. The following recommendations are made for the attention of those who have an academic development role:

- Engage with academic staff to identify the key challenges they are facing and design professional development sessions to address these specific challenges;
- Clearly articulate the goals of professional development sessions, aligning them with the achievement of university performance goals, strategies, projects, or targets as laid out in the strategic plans and also with career progression as appropriate;
- Facilitate the engagement of academics with professional development sessions through more flexible availability of opportunities – using various locations and times of the day and making it available online as appropriate;
- Keep systematic records of staff engagement with professional development. Use this data to identify patterns in engagement and to inform planning and delivery of future sessions;
- Carry out a professional development needs analysis (or use the data from the PDRS/PMDS if available) to provide more tailored and targeted professional development for staff;
- Be ever cognisant of academic identity issues in the design and delivery of professional development initiatives;
- Recognise the value of informal and tacit professional development as well as learning on the job and engineer greater opportunities for such forms of development;
- Design evaluations that will better measure the impact and outcomes of the professional development programme; consider using pre and post evaluations and longitudinal evaluations as appropriate;
- Make senior management aware of the impact and outcomes of professional development.

7.2.3 Academic staff

While this research study is primarily focused on the management of professional development, some recommendations that are applicable to individual academic staff arose naturally through the interviews. The case studies revealed that academic staff are not strategic about their own development, often relying on luck for their career progression. Given the autonomous nature of the role, academics should take greater care to ensure that they are engaging in sufficient development opportunities to progress along their desired career pathway. Following are some recommendations for consideration by academic staff:

- Engage in a time management course;
- Inform yourself regarding what is valued in your university's promotional schemes;
- Bearing in mind your own career goals and the goals of your academic department and the university, seek out and strategically select appropriate professional development opportunities on an on-going basis;
- Take a reflective approach to documenting your engagement in professional development and take note of the impact and outcomes of this engagement.

This study has brought important findings and recommendations to the fore. However it has revealed that the topic of holistic professional development that links to organisational performance is under studied and under theorised. There are many more questions that require further investigation.

7.3 Future Research Agenda

Existing literature concerned with academic staff development is predominantly written by academic developers. This topic could usefully be examined through other lenses, for instance from the perspectives of university senior management as the sponsors of development initiatives and from the perspective of academic staff as the consumers of development initiatives. Much of the existing literature focuses on development in relation to the teaching role and more recently on that of the academic leader. A more holistic approach to the topic of development that takes into account the full complexity of the academic role would make a valuable contribution to knowledge on this topic.

Many of the findings presented in this study would merit further investigation. This study found that the term professional development means different things to different people. There would be merit in further exploration of the different concepts of staff development and the extent to which an academics understanding of professional development impacts on their engagement with professional development initiatives.

This study showed that the extent of the university's investment in professional development of academic staff was not well understood by interviewees and this is another area that is worth further investigation. Several of the professional development providers indicated that there are unrealistic expectations coming from management on

what should be achieved through professional development initiatives. Particularly in relation to online learning delivery, it was indicated that the resources being made available are insufficient to achieve the desired organisational outcomes. When university managers know the investment they are making in professional development they will be in a better position to articulate a reasonable expectation regarding the return on this investment.

In relation to trends in academics engagement with professional development initiatives, this study revealed suggestions that early career academics may be more motivated to engage with professional development opportunities. There were some indications that male staff are more likely to engage in some types of professional development than females. It found that some specific areas of development are more popular than others. But in general the findings regarding trends in academics' engagement with professional development were inconclusive. Professional development providers acknowledged record keeping as a weaknesses in their processes, which meant they were not confident in answering questions posed about trends in engagement with their initiatives. That said, all providers indicated that they keep sign-in sheets for all their activities and examination of data from the sign-in sheets presents an opportunity to investigate important questions. For instance what are the predictive indicators of an academics engagement with specific types of development? Is engagement with specific development opportunities influenced by an academic's discipline, role, career trajectory, age, gender etc.? It goes without saying that the use of any data containing details of personnel in the organisation would need to observe strict ethical guidelines. Used appropriately, the collation and analysis of existing records of engagement with professional development has the potential to reveal rich information regarding engagement trends and may in some cases reveal predictive indicators of engagement with specific types of initiatives. Such a finding would be very important for professional development providers and would have implications for future provision. It would serve to inform the design and delivery of future initiatives and would assist in better targeting of staff for specific development opportunities. Such an analysis would reveal the extent to which repeat custom is a feature, and would potentially refute or uphold the claim that some forms of professional development are only reaching the enthusiasts and thence not serving to improve practice where it is most needed. An analysis of existing records may also provide some clues regarding the extent to which engagement in formal offerings of professional development impacts on career progression. This could be enabled through profiling of individuals engagement with professional development, which could then be mapped to their career progression. If a link between professional development and career progression is found, it would be helpful in encouraging wider participation in such initiatives. If no link is found then this would put an onus on professional development providers to clearly demonstrate other benefits to engagement with their initiatives.

In this study many academic staff revealed that they are consumed with their day to day workloads to the point that they have no time to participate in development opportunities. Moreover, they indicated that they often don't see the relevance for them

in the professional development opportunities being offered by their institutions. There would be value in greater exploration regarding what are the professional development needs of the 21st century academic. This question should be investigated both from the wider organisational perspective of what capabilities do staff require to achieve organisational performance goals and also from the narrower individual perspective of what capabilities do staff need to progress successfully in their roles and in their careers. These questions could usefully be investigated using wide scale surveys of university managers, professional development providers and of academic staff. Findings from such surveys would be a useful starting point in articulating a set of capabilities that span all aspects of academic work. Professional development initiatives could then be linked to specific capability development in such a way that its relevance is more tangible to academics and thence more appealing to their interest.

The achievement of university performance goals requires certain capabilities in the operating core and there is merit in greater unpacking of the connections between capability development and levels of performance. If tighter links can be made between engagement in professional development, acquiring of capabilities, and achievement of performance goals (at individual, school, and organisational levels) it would undoubtedly raise the status of professional development at all levels of the organisation. It would also potentially diminish the unhealthy perception that was found to be prevalent in this study that career progression is more reliant on an individual's luck than on their systematic development of professional capabilities.

In conclusion, it was a great privilege to conduct this study and the investigation was only possible due to the enthusiastic participation of the many interviewees involved. All participants in the study showed a keen interest in the topic of professional development. To date research in this area has been dominated by academic developers but conducting this study revealed that this is a topic which is of interest to all levels of the organisation. Furthermore all levels of the organisation have an important contribution to make in developing a better understanding of the potential for professional development to enhance the performance of the university. As an area of research, professional development and its link to organisational performance is under explored and under theorised. Having completed this study, there remain many more questions than answers. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be of particular use to the two universities studied and that the recommendations will have an even wider impact on the evolution of professional development provision in universities, at least in the Irish higher education sector. More than anything it is hoped that this investigation will generate a wider interest in the topic and that it will inspire more researchers, from a range of organisational levels and disciplines, to extend the inquiry and expand the limited knowledge that we currently have in this fascinating area of study.

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9.0 APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviews will be semi-structured and the questions below will act as a guide. Questions will be asked as they become relevant within the conversation.

Interviews with University Management Team (UMT) members

- How is the professional development of academic staff organised? (i.e. Who has overall responsibility for professional development of academic staff?
What structures are in place to support the professional development programme?
What departments make formal offerings of professional development available to academic staff?)
- Why is it organised in this way?
- To what extent is (and should) the provision of CPD be driven by the strategic priorities of the university?
- Do you know what budget is allocated to the various departments for professional development?
- Do you know how the budget is arrived at?
- What proportion of the budget would it be reasonable to allocate to CPD of academic staff?
- What determines the budget that will be allocated to each department for professional development?
- How would you define the performance of the university?
- In what way does the professional development provided make a contribution to the performance of the university? Can you give some examples? (any financial or educational benefits)
- What contribution should/could it make?
- What are the strengths of the institutional approach to the professional development programme?
- Do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how the institutional approach to CPD provision could be improved?
- How is the contribution to university performance measured? (Are there KPI's associated: what are the KPIs?)
- What should the KPI's be?
- Anything else to add?

Interviews with professional development providers

- How is the professional development of academic staff organised? (i.e. Who has overall responsibility for professional development of academic staff? What structures are in place to support the professional development programme? What departments make formal offerings of professional development available to academic staff?)

- Why is it organised in this way?
- What formal offerings of professional development does your department make available for academic staff?
- How are the decisions made on what development opportunities are offered? i.e. How are the initiatives/ programmes/ topics chosen? Why these and not others?
- Who delivers the professional development sessions?
- What budget is allocated to professional development of academic staff in your department? Do you know how that budget is arrived at?
- Do you keep a record of uptake of professional development opportunities?
- Roughly what percentage of academic staff take up the opportunities offered?
- Have you noticed any patterns or trends?
- Are there any incentives for academic staff to engage with the professional development opportunities on offer?
- Are there any barriers to the engagement of academic staff with the professional development opportunities on offer?
- What is the overall objective of the professional development programme offered by your department?
- What are the strengths of your professional development programme?
- Do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how the programme could be improved?
- In what way does the professional development provided make a contribution to the performance of the university? Can you give some examples? (any financial or other benefits)
- What contribution should/could it make?
- Aside from your department, what other departments make formal offerings of professional development available to academic staff?
- How does your programme of professional development fit with the other formal offerings of professional development outside of your department?
- Do you systematically collect comments from participants on programmes? Who sees these? How are they used?
- Has there ever been a formal evaluation of what is offered? What was the outcome?
- From a personal perspective, how has your own engagement with CPD opportunities impacted on your ability to contribute to the university (and on your own career progression)?
- Anything else to add?

Interviews with academic staff

- What forms of professional development are made available to you? (informal and formal)
- To what extent do you engage with the professional development opportunities available to you?
- How is this communicated to you?
- How do you decide what sessions to attend?
- Who offers the professional development initiatives/ programmes/ sessions? Who delivers them?
- What do you think the university is trying to achieve through its professional development programme?
- What are the strengths of the university's approach to professional development provision?
- Do you have any suggestions or recommendations on how the institution's approach to professional development provision could be improved?
- Do you keep a record of your attendance at CPD sessions? (If yes, why?)
- How has the professional development you engaged in contributed to your professional development? Can you give some examples?
- Do you have any suggestions on how your approach to your own professional development could be improved?
- Does your engagement with the professional development provided help you to make a contribution to the performance of your department?
- Does your engagement with the professional development provided help you to make a contribution to the performance of the university (as defined within the strategic plan)?
- Anything else to add?